Guitar MAGAZINE

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GEORGE BENSON
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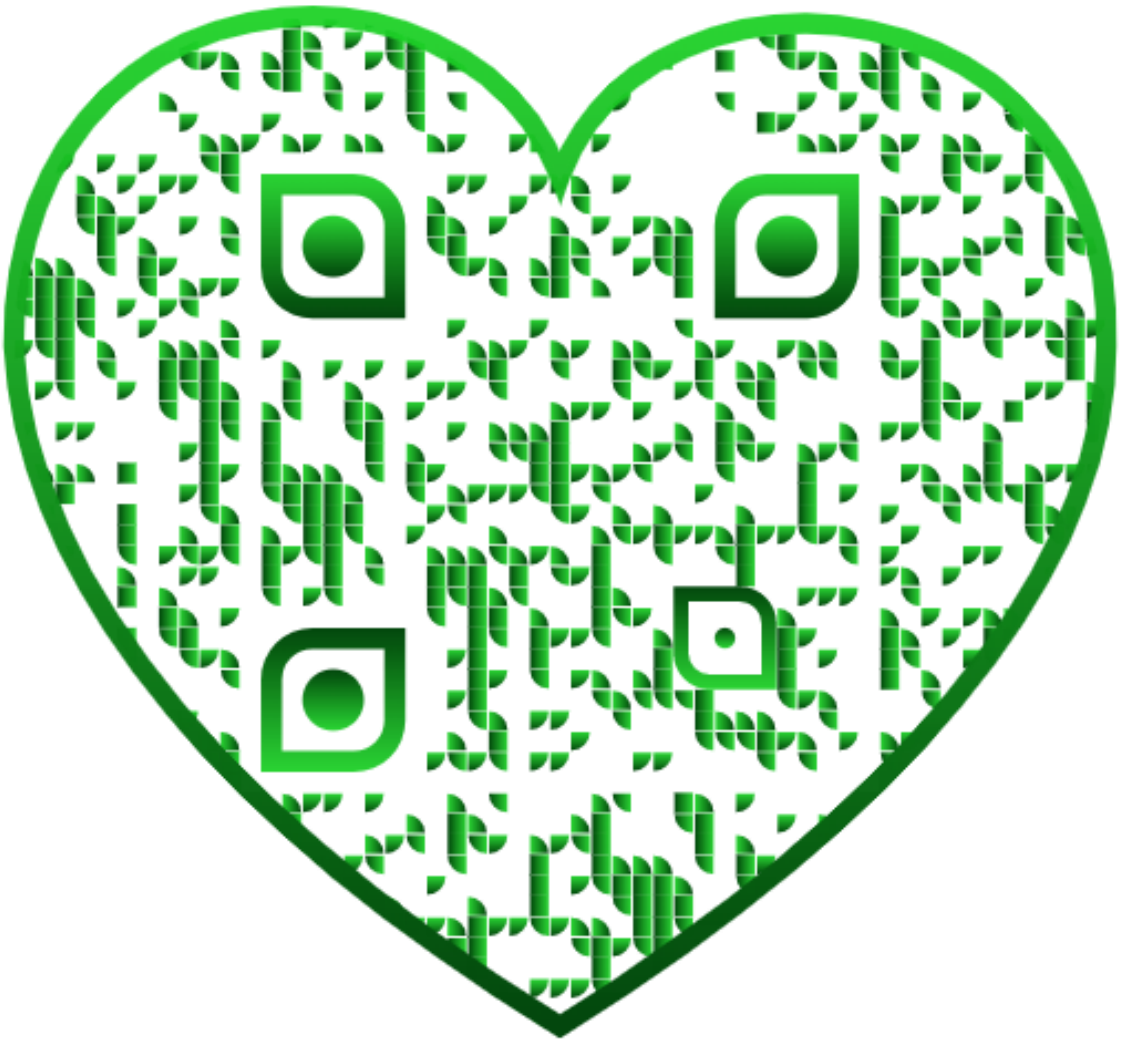
THE HISTORY OF OVERDRIVE



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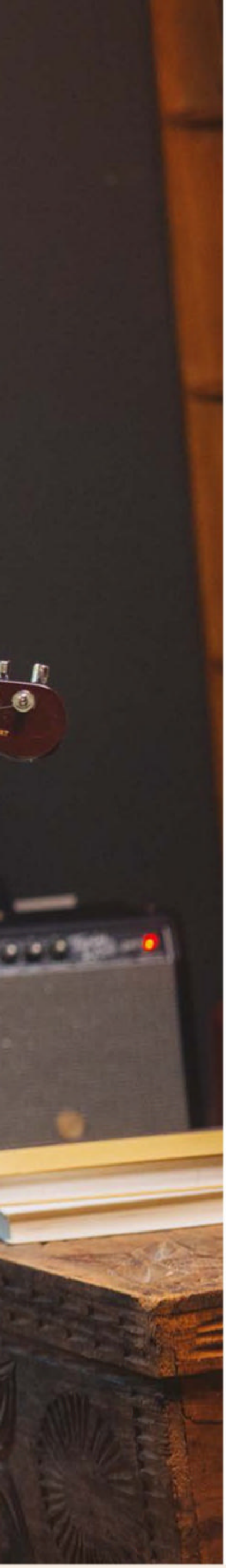

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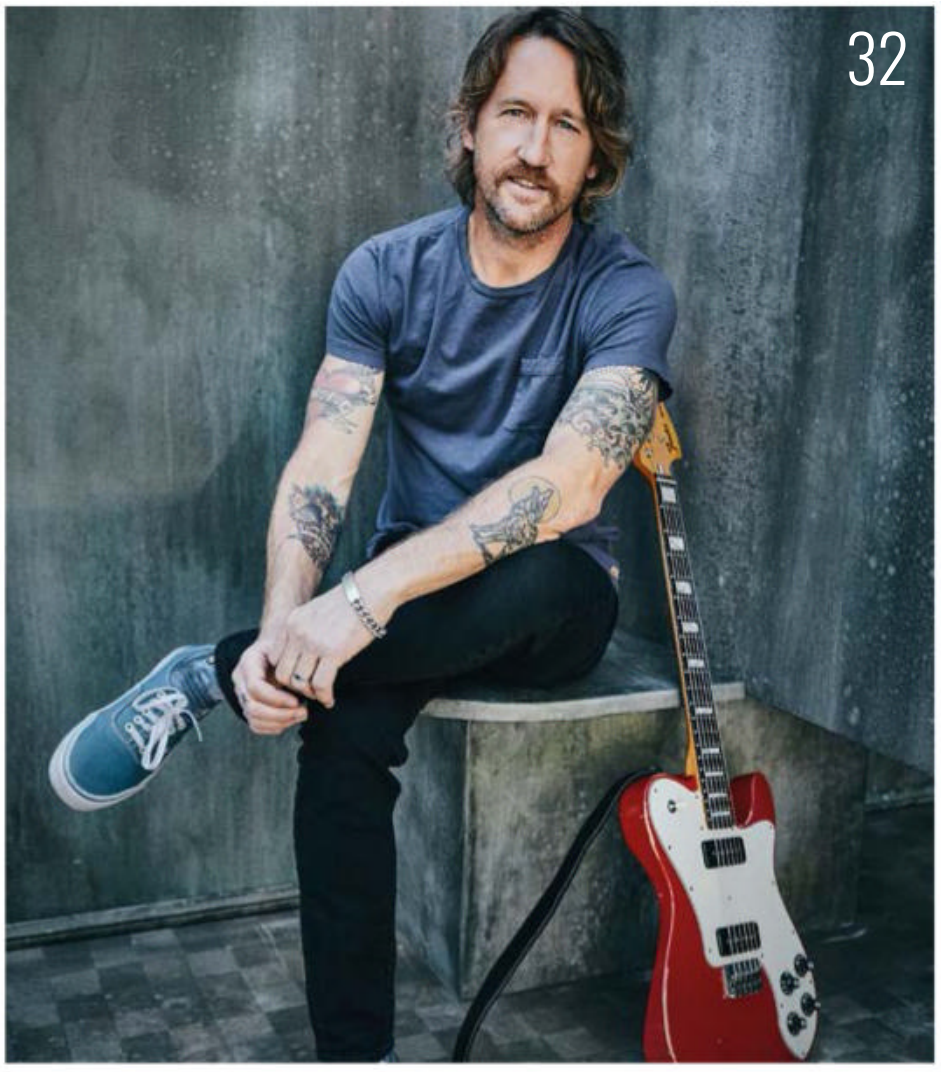
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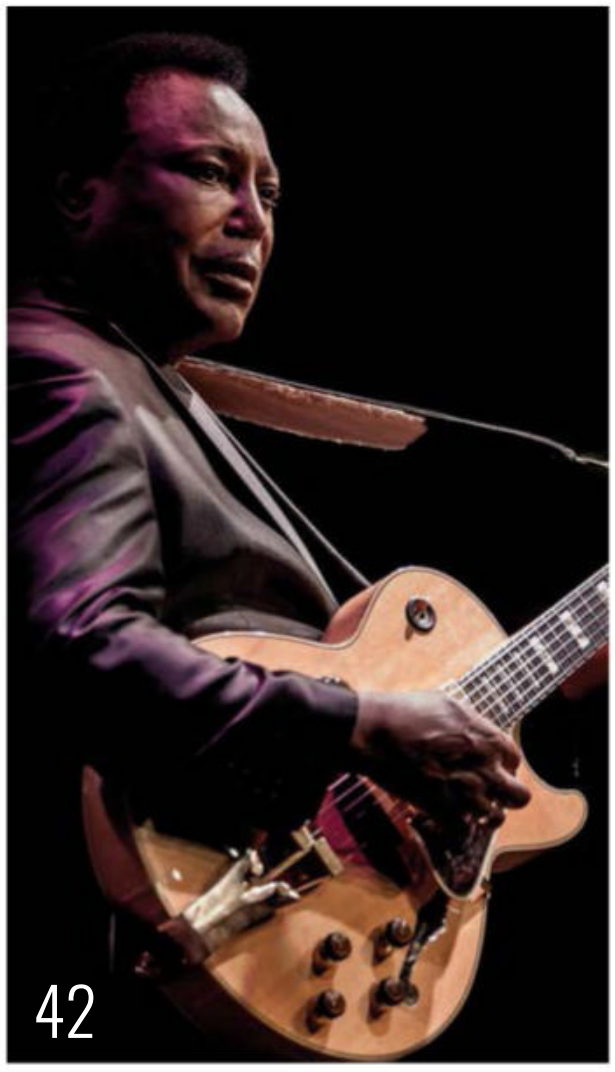
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Unit 7, Riverside Court,
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EDITORIAL

CHIEF EDITOR Chris Vinnicombe
MANAGING EDITOR Josh Gardner
ART EDITOR Philip Millard
PRODUCTION EDITOR Sean McGeady
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Sam Roberts
INSTRUMENT PHOTOGRAPHY Eleanor Jane
CONTRIBUTORS Michael James Adams, Mark Alexander, Tony Bacon, Huw Baines, Chris Fantana, Rod Fogg, Leigh Fuge, Dave Hunter, Ed Olezsko, Huw Price, Richard Purvis, Paul Robson, Michael Watts
HAVE A STORY? Email us at editors@guitar.com

SALES

ASSOCIATE MANAGER, COMMERCIAL AND PARTNERSHIPS Joe Supple
joe.supple@guitar.com

PRODUCTION & OPERATIONS

PUBLISHING PRODUCTION MANAGER Craig Broadbridge
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5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU

BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Meng Ru Kuok
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Ivan Chen
UK COUNTRY DIRECTOR & HEAD OF STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS (EMEA) Holly Bishop
AVP, WEB TECHNOLOGIES Laurent Le Graverend
AVP, COMMS & PARTNERSHIPS Lauren Hendry Parsons
AVP, GROUP & BRAND STRATEGY Krystle Hall
ART DIRECTOR
Simon Freeborough
MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY Iliyas Ong
ASSOCIATE MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY
Terence Stanley
STAFF WRITERS Cillian Breathnach, Daniel Seah
EDITORIAL PRODUCTION INTERN Billy Chua

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EDITOR'S LETTER

COME TOGETHER

Interacting with other musicians in person may be extremely challenging at the moment but the spirit of collaboration has never been so abundant in the guitar industry. The design process behind this month's cover star saw Epiphone and Gibson Custom put their heads together to create an affordable take on that most holy of grails, the 1959 Les Paul Standard. Meanwhile, this year's virtual incarnation of the NAMM Show saw a deluge of new signature models released into the world as brands and artists unveiled the fruits of the past 12 months of mood boards, 3D-printed mock-ups, colour swatches, prototyping and everything else that goes with it.

On p8, we ask this question of our team members and contributors but I'm also going to throw it out to you, dear readers: which two brands would you like to see collaborate on a fantasy guitar, amplifier or pedal, and why? Write in and let us know and we'll print our favourite suggestions – with bonus points awarded for Photoshop mock-ups. Personally, I'd like to see Strymon and Apple collaborate on a silver-bullet direct audio and video recording solution for iPhones, ideally wireless, with zero latency and amp-like sounds and feel. It must be possible, right?

Finally, as I write this, we're celebrating our busiest month ever for web traffic on *Guitar.com*. It's a testament to the tireless efforts of a team separated by thousands of miles and working remotely but somehow still managing to create the best guitar content you'll find anywhere. When, eventually, we all get to be in the same room together again, the drinks are on me. Something tells me I may live to regret that statement…

Enjoy this month's mag and I'll see you next time!

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
chris@guitar.com

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Guitar CONTRIBUTORS

Inspired by the first collaboration between Epiphone and the Gibson Custom Shop – the Epiphone 1959 Les Paul Standard, reviewed on p88 – we asked our contributors and team members to pluck out the pie-in-the-sky partnerships they'd love to see.

MARK ALEXANDER

TALENT WRANGLER

For this issue, writer and photographer Mark interviewed one of his guitar heroes, George Benson – but it didn't come easily. "It took ages to arrange," he says. "When it eventually happened, the connection wasn't great, with a huge delay and feedback – on a George Benson interview! You could not make it up." We think it was worth it. Head to p42 to judge for yourself. Mark's dream guitar union is old meets new. "I'd love to see an old marque like Burns hook up with a progressive big-name brand to bring out the best of these often overlooked instruments."

TONY BACON

DRIVE HISTORIAN

An author on all things guitar, past and present, Tony's grasp on the instrument's history is unfettered. Flick to p66 to read his history of overdrive – but remember to pack your earplugs. "I had to listen to some nice clean Tele after all that distorted filth," he says. As for Tony's fantasy alliance, it's a real meeting of the minds. "I fancy the idea of Danelectro collaborating with Teuffel," he says. "Just imagine: Ulrich Teuffel's skeletal, minimalist approach plus Nat Daniel's budget materials and lipstick pickups – at Danelectro prices, please."

CILLIAN BREATHNACH

PEDAL PROPONENT

When he's not covering the latest news for *Guitar.com*, Cillian indulges his penchant for pedals. But he favours mucking about with cheap gear than going after 'the one', which explains his many strange DIY kit and secondhand fuzzes. Still, he has room for a few more stompboxes, especially an unholy union between Chase Bliss Audio and Death By Audio. "The perfect control of Chase Bliss's pedal format would collide completely with the sonic chaos of DBA's approach," he says, "and likely create something interesting in the process."

LEIGH FUGE

GUITAR GUIDE

A guitar obsessive, Leigh has more than 15 years of experience on the stage and in the studio. These days, you'll find him shooting videos for his YouTube channel @LeighFugeGuitar. In this issue, he tackles some blues licks inspired by Buddy Guy. Flip to p138 for a lesson in fiery Strat runs – Leigh's only excuse for using a Stratocaster bridge pickup. He'd love to see Shergold Guitars collaborate with Fender. "I love Shergold's triple single-coil Masquerader," he says. "It's the perfect Strat-Tele hybrid. I'd like to see them team up."

RICHARD PURVIS

STOMPBOX VALET

Alongside jobs in journalism, Richard has gigged as a guitarist, bassist and drummer and has produced music for TV. For this issue, we had him put his foot down and review a few fascinating effects. "Testing the Origin pedals was dreamy but slightly stressful," he says, "like driving a borrowed Rolls-Royce." Turn to p108 to find out if he kept to the road. Richard's ideal industry tie-up would be pedal-based too. "I'd like to see Neo Instruments work with Red Panda on a pedal that simulates a Leslie cabinet in urgent need of repair."

PAUL ROBSON

GRUNGE ORIGINAL

He describes his playing as "rudimentary at best" but Paul still loves guitar deeply, and has written for guitar mags for more than 20 years. As a grunge obsessive, it was his pleasure to coax some guitar revelations from Foo Fighter and former Nirvana man Pat Smear for this month's Guitar Interview (and he was happy that neither Pat nor Chris Shiflett hung up when he compared them to Little Steven and Nils Lofgren). Paul would like to see Fender and MXR team up on a Thinline Tele with inbuilt Carbon Copy circuit – chimey delay bliss.

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

Higher ground: Troy's SG-style lockdown build is more Chicago green than Chicago blues

LOVER'S GUIDE

Hi. I just read the article on the history of the Gibson Flying V [issue 389] in which it was claimed that it was Seth Lover who designed the Flying V. But was it not Ted McCarthy that came up with the concept for the Flying V, Explorer and Moderne?

DARREN BAIRD, VIA EMAIL

Tony Bacon responds: *"This is a bit of a grey area, Darren, and so far there is no definitive answer. My own view, having interviewed both McCarty and Lover years ago, is that McCarty probably asked his team to come up with something 'new and different' and that Lover probably did make some sketches for the look of the Modernistics. The most likely Gibson man to have developed the ideas into something practical would have been Larry Allers. But we'll probably never know the precise details for sure."*

SIGNAL PAIN

Hi, guys. I am an avid reader of your magazine and have just come back to playing my guitars after a 20-year absence – sacrilege I know! Obviously technology has progressed in that time so I put a lot of 'wishes' on my Christmas list and was lucky enough to receive some great kit. The issue now is how to put all the stuff together, so hence me contacting you to see if you have an idiot's guide to the best way to do this, as none of the YouTube videos I have seen actually address this in a comprehensive way.

I have electric guitars and now have the following kit: a Boss Katana MKII, a Boss GA-FC, a BeatBuddy, an original Colorsound wah pedal and an expression pedal.

I understand that, for a novice, setting them up can be complicated and you can affect settings if not done correctly, so my questions are:

1 Which order do I connect them up in
2 Tips for dos and don'ts
3 How they will or can be set up to control things

I'm sure there are other budding guitarists out there who are just as confused as me. Thanks for your help!

JOHN BAKER, ESSEX

Thank you for your email, John, and welcome back – you certainly had a good Christmas! The gear you have is mostly, quite straightforward to hook up. You haven't mentioned which Katana MKII you've got but regardless whether it's the 50 or the 100-watt version, you should see that on the back of the amp, you'll have two outputs, one labelled EXP and the other labelled GA-FC. Of course, this is where you plug in both the expression pedal and the GA-FC multi-footswitch. Nice and simple.

For the wah, again it's very simple – as most people will have the wah at the front of the signal chain (ie before all your overdrive and other effects), so all you need to do is run one lead from your guitar to your wah and the other straight into your main input on the front of the amp. If you decide you don't want the wah at the front of the chain, however, you may have an issue as all your effects will be coming from within the Katana.

Finally, and most trickily… the BeatBuddy. As a drum machine, you might not want this running in your guitar's signal chain because that will mean that your beats will become effected too, so your best option here may be to use the Katana's aux input (again, around the back) to run the drums separately to the guitar. To do this, you'll need a mini-jack to mono-jack cable, which can be bought for under a tenner. Plug it into the aux and you should hear your beats come through clearly and unmolested.

As for the dos and don'ts – there aren't any! Between the GA-FC and the expression pedal, you have a huge amount of control at your feet, so do download the Tone Studio editor for your Katana and dig deep into the presets – the fact that you have the Colorsound taking care of wah-wah tones means the expression is free to do more esoteric things, so see what else you can assign it to in the editor and experiment with it. The best part about having a multi-effects set-up such as this is the freedom it gives you to explore unconventional combinations. You'll probably make some ugly noises along the way but that's part of the fun!

GREEN DAY

Hey, Guitar. After seeing the lockdown builds from readers over recent months, I wanted to reach out and share a guitar that I just finished building. I'm a repair tech at Chicago Fret Works and this was a guitar I built in my free time there. The body is one-piece mahogany, as is the neck, which has a bona fide Brazilian rosewood fingerboard. I then lacquered it with nitro, stuck in some gold EVO frets, and even wound the humbuckers myself at the shop. What do you guys think?

TROY ANDERSON, CHICAGO

GOOD TO GO

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CHUBBY AND THE GANG

WORDS SAM ROBERTS

Guitar players Ethan Stahl and Tom 'Razor' Hardwick of Chubby and the Gang discuss the importance of playing as loud and hard as you can, the enduring influence of Motörhead and not getting overzealous about amps and pedals

From left to right: guitarist Ethan Stahl, bassist Maegan Brooks, guitarist Tom Hardwick, vocalist Charles 'Chubby' Manning-Walker, and drummer Joe McMahon

What first inspired you to pick up a guitar?

Razor: "I got an electric guitar for Christmas when I was about seven, a junior Strat copy thing. I think it was a Cort. I used to pick it up and tinker around on it but couldn't get the co-ordination down as it was right-handed and I'm a lefty, and I'd assumed to play it upside down. Anyway, it was proper uncomfortable so I flipped it the other way and it just clicked. I play right-handed and I should have all along. I taught myself and have been playing ever since."

Ethan: "I got into playing guitar through my uncle Joe. He would come over to my mum's and we'd have a guitar laying around the house. He'd pick it up and play it. I was getting into bands like Nirvana at the time and I thought it looked like a fun thing to do. He showed me a few things and that was it, I haven't stopped playing since. I was pretty young at the time."

Tell us about your main guitar and pedal setup.

R: "My main guitar is a 1994 Fender Deluxe Strat. It's a prized possession to me. I use a treble booster too, which I bought cheap. It's a Dallas Rangemaster clone. Other than that, just a tuner. I'm after a Boss EQ though, to switch out for my treble booster."

E: "My main guitar at the moment is a Fender Tele, a Vintera 50s I believe. It's based off the 1950s Teles anyway. Looks cool as and plays amazingly. Sounds incredible when played quietly or with high gain – great for playing in this band. Right now, I'm not using any pedals apart from my tuner really [laughs] and I'm playing through whatever amp they have at the practice space."

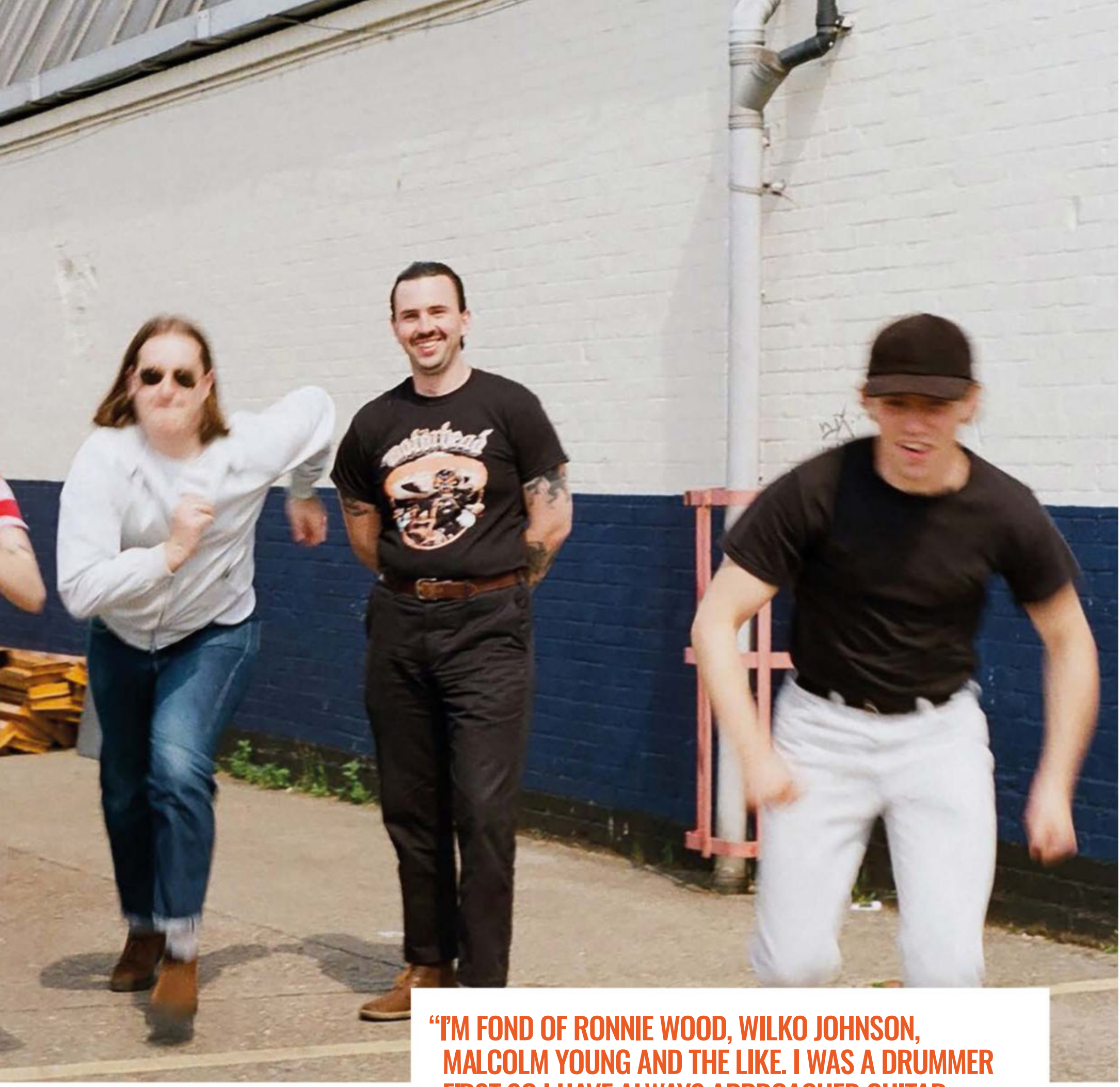
What do you sound like and what's interesting about your approach to playing guitar?

R: "I play predominantly rhythm guitar and I'm fond of Ronnie Wood, Wilko Johnson, Malcolm Young and the like. I was a drummer first so I have always approached guitar from a percussive angle. I've only just learned how to hold a pick over the last few years too, as I only ever used my hands."

E: "My sound is inspired by guitarists like 'Fast' Eddie Clarke, Johnny Thunders and Angus Young – simple, loud Marshall-style high-gain tones. I'd say that my approach to playing is methodical in the way that I'm always thinking about what it is that I'm playing."

Your debut LP moves between New York-style punk, Motörhead-inspired muscle and British wit. How did you determine that stylistic approach?

R: "Listening to punk and Motörhead and being a witty cunt just seemed to come naturally to Chubby."



"I'M FOND OF RONNIE WOOD, WILKO JOHNSON, MALCOLM YOUNG AND THE LIKE. I WAS A DRUMMER FIRST SO I HAVE ALWAYS APPROACHED GUITAR FROM A PERCUSSIVE ANGLE"

You also worked with Fucked Up's Jonah Falco. How did his influence impact the recording process?

R: "There's no one word to describe Jonah and the impact he's had on the band. He helped me hone my playing style, my sound and my approach to writing and recording. His enthusiasm made me feel like what we were doing in the moment was something absolutely worth it, as if we were born to do it. If there's a better teacher, kicker-up-the-arse or music wizard, let me know because you'd be hard pressed to find 'em."

The *Speed Kills* LP was recently re-released on Partisan. Did you make any changes to the album before it was relaunched?

E: "We had it remastered and included an additional song, *Union Dues*, which was recorded during the *Speed Kills* session. The back cover and insert were also changed and deluxe copies came with a colour-in cover and a pack of crayons."

Your live shows are intimate and visceral. Is this something you have to rehearse to really nail?

R: "We've all played in punk and hardcore bands for years prior to this so we feel quite well practised in that respect. Sometimes we play to 20, sometimes to 200, in venues that range from pubs and squats to clubs with actual monitors and gear mic'd up. Playing shows with CATG is natural and comfortable and, honestly, it's where I wanna be 100 per cent of the time."

E: "I don't think there's any way you can rehearse a live show in a practice room. I think just go out and play the hardest you can and hope for the best. Balls to the wall!"

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

R: "I'll still be with this lot writing and touring probably. By this point, maybe we've got into pyrotechnics and Joe's arms have finally fallen off from playing too fast."

E: "Hopefully we will still be on tour then, still putting out records and hanging out full time."

***Speed Kills* is out now on Partisan**

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

MAXIMO PARK
NATURE ALWAYS WINS

Written and recorded in isolation across two continents, the new album features borrowed guitars, layered violins and a few Japanese curios…

Maximo Park planned to record their seventh long-player under the tutelage of Grammy-winning Ben Allen at Maze Studios in Atlanta. But the British rockers' aims were curtailed by the ongoing pandemic and the band ended up bouncing ideas off each other and Allen in a digital capacity instead. They soon realised that they had an opportunity to work around the clock on *Nature Always Wins*, considering their less restrictive timetables a breeding ground for creativity. Here, lead songwriter and guitar player Duncan Lloyd picks his standout guitar moments from the LP.

BABY, SLEEP

"It's funny with this one. The riff, beat and chorus vocal melody came to me pretty much at the same time. I had to be quick recording the demo because it felt like the idea could go as easily as it arrived. There's a simplicity to it and that was something I was interested in returning to with songs for this album. Rather than playing straight major and minor chords, I added a moving riff, playing through what I think is a ninth and passing notes that run down to F. It works around the snare hits that sound a bit backwards, which I like. There's a guitar shop in Newcastle called Curvy Sounds and they helped bring back to life my very first electric guitar, a 1990s Japanese Squier. I wrote and recorded the main riff on it, in combination with a Matsumoku-built 1980s Westone Rainbow II."

VERSIONS OF YOU

"This was the last piece of music I wrote for the album. We have a song called *The Undercurrents* and it reminds me a little of that. It's a style of writing that I like to go to every now and then, which is probably best described as moody and melancholic but can build into something epic. I worked closely with our producer Ben Allen on building the rhythms between guitar, bass and drums. The riffs are a combination of guitar and Fender Bass IV lines leading to these big rhythmical guitar stabs thrown into the chorus, adding a momentum underpinned by a melodic bass pattern. As we were in lockdown, I recorded most of the guitar and bass parts at home, recorded using a DI and plugins and pedals for a vibe. I'd send the parts to Ben in Atlanta and he would re-amp them."

MEETING UP

"When I first put the music together for this, it was all done on keyboards, mainly a small Yamaha and a Moog. My intention was to have no guitars, for a different mood. About two-thirds of the way through, I realised it needed something else, and I could hear a David Lynch-inspired thing as I'd recently rewatched both *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet*. I played a guitar line, keeping it sparse and echoey, using an RE-201 tape delay and a little tremolo. I also added some extra tape delay and a spring reverb for that Lynch filmic feel. It's played on a Lee Ranaldo signature Jazzmaster."

WHY MUST A BUILDING BURN?

"The whole verse riff most likely comes from some of the music I grew up listening to in the early 1990s when I first started learning to play – bands like The Vaselines, Breeders, Slowdive. There was a lot of melodic, heavier guitar music at that time that I was drawn to and it feels like I was subconsciously tapping into that. Recognising some influence from there, I moved away from doing a big wash of guitars and instead based the track around the acoustic. Rhythmic and droned was the idea. I mixed in some cleaner electric top lines using a Mexican Jazzmaster with a Lollar humbucker bridge pickup, nicked from a guitar I borrowed from Jeff Tweedy of Wilco on our last album. It's interesting to reference an earlier time in my life without getting too nostalgic. It may sound weird but certain chords mixed together remind me of my hometown of Derby so I play them out."

PARTLY OF MY MAKING

"This song opens the album and it's a bit different, probably because of the speed. It's a slow-burner. The demo was a lot faster. It had a bratty punk feel initially but Ben and our drummer Tom [English] decided to go for a half-speed feel. I layered an alternative riff that ties in with the main riff with a Z.Vex Lo-Fi Junkie pedal, played on a '64 Gibson SG with a single P-90. I wanted the second line to feel warped and odd like an old market-stall record player. Additionally, Annie Leith, the album's engineer, doubled it with her violin parts. I loved that the riffs grew to be a real collaboration with Ben, Annie and the band, and the combination of ideas felt like a positive blast of fresh air in an altogether strange year."

Nature Always Wins is out February 26 on Prolifica Inc

© Em Cole

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers

KINGS OF LEON
The Bandit

The southern Strokes return with the first single from their forthcoming eighth LP. It opens with an off-kilter riff but soon moves into the stadium-sized melodic territory that has long been a cornerstone of the band.

SHAME
Nigel Hitter

Taken from abrasive new record *Drunk Tank Pink*, this track melds Talking Heads rhythms with Billy Bragg-style vocals, with the band also drawing influence from peers Squid and Girl Band for a fresh new sound.

THE BLACK CROWES
Charming Mess

This previously unreleased demo has been put out alongside the reissue of 1990 album *Shake Your Money Maker*. "We had plenty of hit songs on that record," Chris Robinson told *Rolling Stone*. "I guess we didn't need it."

KIWI JR
Waiting In Line

Reminiscent of a forgotten 1970s classic and opening with a sweet 12-string guitar melody, this track is further evidence that *Cooler Returns* is set to be one of the best new albums of 2021.

JULIEN BAKER
Hardline

Lifted from the new album *Little Oblivions*, Baker's melancholic delivery is breathtaking throughout, with droning, single-note guitar melodies underpinning the song's stormy, tumultuous mood.

ROLLING BLACKOUTS COASTAL FEVER
The Only One

The latest single from the Aussie rockers' acclaimed sophomore album provides a hearty blend of bouncy acoustic guitars and duelling electric lead lines that is sure to blow away the winter blues.

FOO FIGHTERS
No Son Of Mine

The second single from new album *Medicine At Midnight* is more akin to a traditional Foos song than lead single *Shame Shame*. It boasts a brutal descending riff and, at 2:20, a solid southern boogie impression.

NOFX
Linewleum

The punk legends go meta for this reworking of their much-covered 'non-hit' *Linoleum*. "It's a song about not playing a song that's not a hit song with a video about other bands covering the song," says frontman Fat Mike.

PSYCHEDELIC PORN CRUMPETS
Pukebox

The Aussie band's first release of 2021 and fifth from *SHYGA! The Sunlight Mound* is a blistering ride with searing guitars, fizzing drums and the odd bit of melodica thrown in for good measure.

AC/DC
Realize

Taken from comeback album *PWR/UP*, the video for this song saw each member shoot their parts separately before they were cut together into a single seamless shot. Angus's guitar tricks seem to just get better with age.

TESSEL
Family Time

Their first release as part of the PIAS family, Utrecht indie-pop quartet Tessel here hone the summery vibes of The Drums and The Magic Gang with luscious guitar melodies and abundant vocal harmonies.

MAKGONA TSOHLE BAND
Bajikise Bops

Reissued on British label Umsakazo and shining a light on South African music, the opening track on *Makgona Tsohle Reggi* weaves a 1950s rock 'n' roll melody with African rhythms and a ska feel.

WIN AN ORANGE TERROR STAMP

WORTH £149!

Pedalboard amps have been all the rage in recent years and, in an age where the vast majority of us don't have the ability to play out, the need to keep quiet at home is more important than ever. Launched at NAMM 2020, Orange's Terror Stamp offers a smaller and more affordable take on the pedalboard preamp than many of its peers but doesn't skimp on tone or features.

Onboard is a fully-fledged valve preamp based on its Micro Dark mini-head, a buffered effects loop, a DI/headphone output with cab simulation and footswitchable output levels, and a shape knob that offers a wide array of tones. You can also plug your favourite preamp into the return socket and use the Terror Stamp simply as a power amp too.

To be in with a chance of adding this pocket-sized rock box to your set-up, head to *Guitar.com* and answer the following question. Good luck!

Which of the following is NOT an Orange amplifier model?

1) Tiny Terror
2) Teeny Terror
3) Micro Terror

Head to guitar.com/competitions to enter.

Terms & Conditions

The closing date is 23:59 GMT, 5 March 2021.

The Company's decision is final. This competition is open to the United Kingdom residents only. This competition is open to 18 years old and above only. For full terms and conditions, please go to bnd.la/gm-ctos.

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NAMM 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

Though there was no physical show this year, NAMM's Believe In Music Week virtual event saw a wealth of launches from across the industry. Here's our pick of the most interesting and exciting new gear…

FENDER NOVENTA STRATOCASTER

Fender never fails to bring a boatload to NAMM, with 2021 yielding a new 75th Anniversary range and signature models for Jason Isbell, Chrissie Hynde and more. But it was the Noventa range that really caught our eye, bringing P-90-style pickups to a trio of classic Fender models and offering new sonic possibilities in abundance.

COLLINGS 470 JL

A new signature model created for virtuoso guitarist Julian Lage, the 470 JL features Duo Jet stylings that are a departure for Collings but stunning nonetheless. Hollow trestle-block construction pairs perfectly with new Ron Ellis pickups, while the antiqued patina of the nitro finish adds a subtly vintage feel.

EASTMAN ROMEO LA

We loved the original Romeo and this stunning Celestine Blue update has us California dreamin'. New features include Seymour Duncan Phat Cat pickups (with Radiator Gold Foil covers) and Göldo hardware, which includes the expressive Les Trem vibrato and three-point Vario bridge, a combination that promises all the wonderful wobble you could wish for.

GIBSON KIRK DOUGLAS SG

Gibson's focus for 2021 so far seems to be on a run of beautiful new signature models but this SG for the Grammy-winning Roots guitarist stands out from the crowd – and then some. Available in Ebony or Inverness Green, the Kirk Douglas SG boasts a trio of BurstBuckers, as well as block inlays and a Kirk Douglas signature 'Captain' Lyre Tail Vibrola tailpiece.

HIGHLIGHTS

GRETSCH G6129T-89VS VINTAGE SELECT '89 SPARKLE JET WITH BIGSBY

While not an officially sanctioned tribute, it's surely no coincidence that Gretsch has chosen to reissue the same late 1980s Sparkle Jet model that Chris Cornell used in Soundgarden's iconic music video for *Black Hole Sun*. Sporting TV Jones pickups, the '89 reissue is available in both Gold and Silver Sparkle, or as a regular Duo Jet.

STERLING BY MUSIC MAN MARIPOSA

Omar Rodríguez-López's signature model has proven to be a hit since its launch in 2019, so it's no surprise to see the arrival of an affordable Sterling version. This one has a nyatoh body and roasted maple neck, and while it loses the US-made model's ornate pickguard, it's available in fetching Dorado Green and Imperial White.

EVH 5150

The Fender-owned brand pays tribute to its namesake with a new range of revamped 5150 electrics that feature twin humbuckers, Floyd Rose vibratos with D-Tunas, and an arcade-button killswitch on the lower bout. It's a guitar that'll get you noticed, alright – especially in this none-more-eighties shade of Neon Pink with matching hockey stick headstock.

IBANEZ FLATV1 JOSH SMITH SIGNATURE

Josh Smith is one of the most talented guitarists on the planet, and he describes this new Ibanez signature model as "a lifetime dream fulfilled." The T-style instrument features a curved control plate, an ash body and a roasted maple neck with a 25.5-inch scale length, as well as Smith's signature Seymour Duncan pickup set. "They let me do everything I wanted," he says.

PRS SILVER SKY LUNAR ICE

John Mayer's signature guitar came to NAMM 2020 dressed in a remarkable Nebula polychromatic finish that PRS dubbed 'Flip Flop' because the colours morphed depending on the lighting and viewing angle. This year, we have yet another Flip Flop shade entitled Lunar Ice, which offers hues of green, pink, blue, purple and more – with a maple neck to boot.

MARTIN OOL EARTH

Martin says of this striking hand-painted instrument that it's "not just a guitar" but a "call to action on climate change". The reason for this? Not only is every bit of wood on the guitar 100 per cent FSC-certified as being from sustainable forests but the instrument is also completely plastic-free. Even the gigbag is made of sustainable hemp – that's a legal high we can get behind.

TAYLOR GT K21CE

Taylor launched its new compact Grand Theater body shape back in October last year and has expanded the initial range with the 800 series 811e and this all-koa model. "Tonally, this guitar is the perfect demonstration of the midrange balance and sweetness koa is known for," says Taylor's Andy Powers.

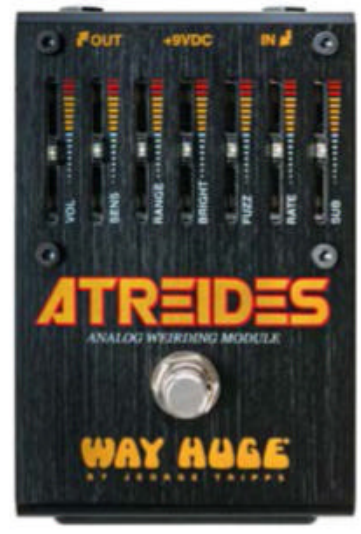
FENDER '68 CUSTOM VIBRO CHAMP

Even before the pandemic confined us all to playing alone, opportunities to crank a valve amp were increasingly rare, which makes this reimagining of a silverface classic a no-brainer for home playing and recording. Five watts, built-in reverb and tremolo, and a 10-inch Celestion – what more do you need?

HIGHLIGHTS

BLACKSTAR ID:CORE 40 V3

The first two iterations of Blackstar's ID:Core range proved hugely popular with at-home guitarists and beginners. Thanks to the combination of Blackstar's Super Wide Stereo tech, a new Cab Rig Lite speaker simulator for headphone players and paired stereo speakers in the 10, 20 and 40-watt models, the upgraded ID:Core V3 amplifiers promise to be the best-sounding yet.



WAY HUGE ATREIDES

The latest left-field idea from Jeorge Tripps comes inspired by the Electro-Harmonix mini-synths of the 1980s, and brands itself as an 'analogue weirding module'. That's sounds about right when you realise that not only does its name come from Frank Herbert's *Dune* but this beast combines an analogue synth, fuzz, octaver and phaser to create bizarre but brilliant tones.

WALRUS AUDIO MAKO R1

Walrus launched its Mako line of high-end DSP pedals last year with the D1 delay, and 2021 sees the range expanding by two. The ACS1 amp and cab sim seems well tailored to these times but it's the R1 reverb, which sports six SHARC-powered sounds and huge MIDI-controlled tweakability, that we're most looking forward to.

JACKSON AUDIO FUZZ

Not content with offering one or two fuzz tones onboard, the Fuzz lets you swap out physical circuit modules to change the sound. You get the choice of modern or vintage modules out of the box but a further four modules are sold separately for those who crave ultimate fuzz flexibility.

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INTRODUCING

TASH SULTANA

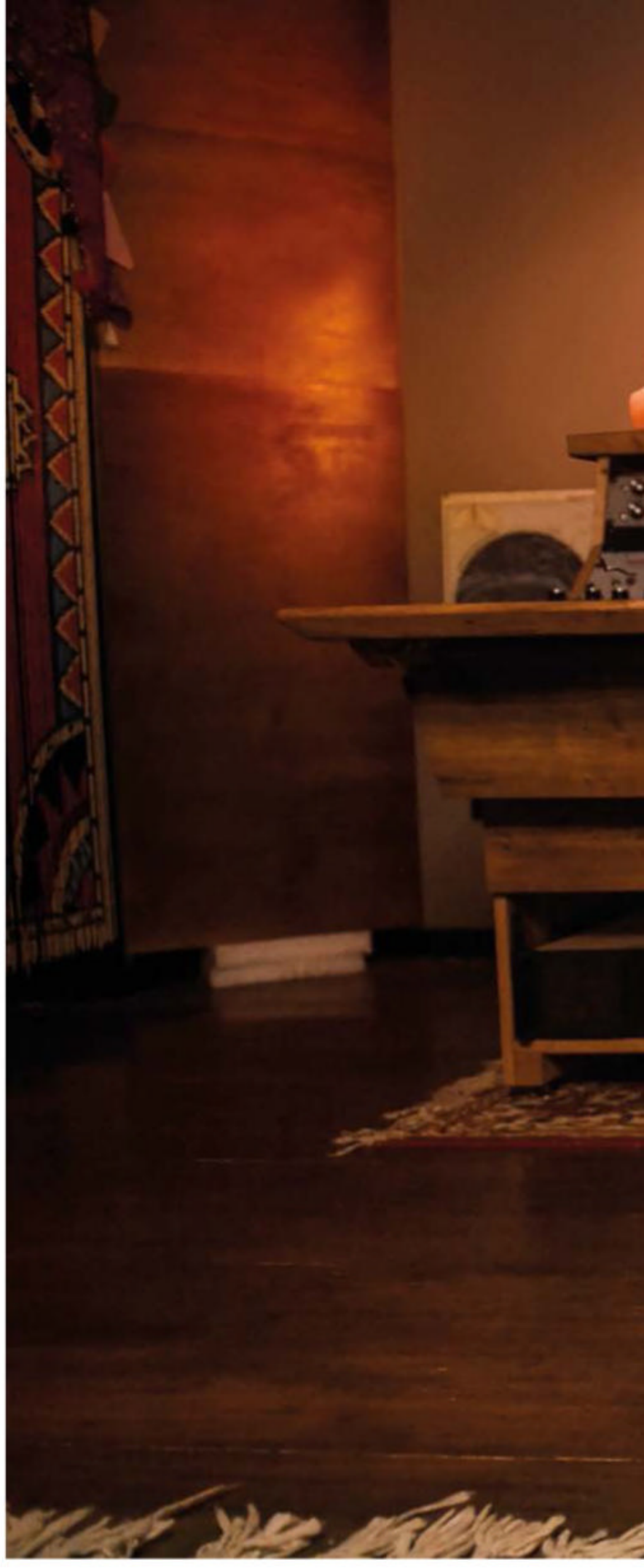
WORDS HUW BAINES
IMAGES FENDER

The Aussie guitarist has been marked out as one of the instrument's most individual young talents. Now, as they release a stunning new Fender signature model, we speak to the 25-year-old about their journey from busking to sold-out world tours, striving for a more uplifting guitar culture, and why new album *Terra Firma* shows that Tash is much more than "just a looper"

"It's this tinny little fuckin' banged-up screechy motherfucker!" Tash Sultana is talking about the first distortion pedal they ever owned and, you have to admit, it sounds pretty rad.

"When I was a kid, I heard these grungy, distorted guitar tones,and that blew me away," says Sultana, who identifies as non-binary and uses they/them pronouns. "I was just like, 'That is fuckin' nuts'. My mum took me to the music store when I was maybe nine and I didn't know that you could plug your guitar into a pedal and an amp and change the way that it sounded. I'd tried out a few and they're obviously really expensive for somebody that didn't have two sticks to rub together. Then I found this little shitty distortion pedal that was 20 bucks. Cheapest one. To this day, that's the one I use when I rip a solo."

That pedal has seen some things, because of late those solos are usually heard reverberating around arenas. In the past decade, Sultana has gone from playing open-mic nights as an under-age kid and busking on Melbourne's Bourke Street to breakout YouTube success, a buzzy breakthrough EP in *Notion* and a debut album, *Flow State*, that kicked down further doors on its way to Australia's No.2 spot.



SIGNATURE SOUNDS

These days, Sultana is a one-person Wrecking Crew. Pushing the limitations of loop-pedal performance, they have adopted an anything-goes approach to multi-tasking and frequently swap out six-strings for trumpet, sax, keys, percussion – whatever is to hand. But in recent months, Tash has turned their focus to one particular guitar: a brand-new signature model Stratocaster from Fender. It's a guitar that's as individual as they are, pairing a striking Transparent Cherry finish and 1960s-vibed matching headstock with suitably ostentatious gold hardware complete with skull-motif neckplate and a versatile pickup arrangement created with their uniquely polyphonic loop-heavy style in mind. But despite their star's rapid ascent, at the age of just 25, it's perhaps not surprising that Tash hadn't expected the biggest guitar brand on earth to come calling, asking to develop their dream guitar.

"It wasn't something that was in my mind, to be honest," they admit. "Fender just came at me and said, 'We're thinking maybe you'd like to get together and have your own signature Fender?' And I was just like, 'Um, fuck yeah!' I'm enjoying having a vast guitar collection, because they are an extension of me. But to have something designed that's going to be sold in stores around the world is nuts."

When they first broke out back in 2016, Tash was more often than not seen wielding a Telecaster to craft their many layers of looped guitar brilliance. In the years since, however, they have explored the Fender catalogue, using a Jazzmaster before finally finding their true home with something else entirely: a Stratocaster that boasts a Double Tap splitable bridge pickup to provide numerous sonic options that help Tash create more varied textures.

"I've veered more towards [Strats] as I've progressed," says Sultana. "I've got a really nice collection but the Strat is for me. For a long time, I played Teles and Jazzmasters and Gretsches but I kept listening to these artists and really loved their tone and the way they played. When I did a bit of searching, they were playing fuckin' Stratocasters. And I was like, 'Mate, the search is over. That's the missing element'. I moved across to the Strat and I haven't gone back.

"This guitar is based off an American Pro Series Strat, and when they were first released, Fender gifted me one. I loved it immediately because it's a new-age performance guitar and that's what we're doing. We're getting on stage and performing and we're recording.

"IF I DIED TOMORROW, I'D LOVE TO KNOW THAT PEOPLE WILL HEAR THIS AND REALLY SEE THAT I'M NOT JUST A LOOPER. I JUST LIKE TO JAM"

It's so well designed and the technology and the pickups have come so far that it captures all of the vintage Stratocaster sound, and adds on the advances of what we can now do in the modern day. You can really sculpt your tone, because there's so much to work with on the guitar."

BROAD CHURCH

Sultana's Fender endorsement follows recent artist models from R&B polymath HER as well as alt-pop superstar Billie Eilish. When asked whether the guitar industry is beginning to push away from its default mode as a haven for straight white men, Sultana says: "The guitar industry, many industries, are to a degree dude-oriented. But we're in a different era now. We're not in the 1950s. We're not in the 1960s."

Warming to the subject, Sultana takes aim at the regularity with which guitar fans gravitate towards trolling as a mode of expression when discussing gear and technical ability online. "People tend to be critical, rather than encouraging," they say. "I follow a lot of really good guitarists on Instagram. You can't really fault them, but somebody has to go and do that [to them] anyway. I think that attitude is shit.

"We're all different levels of players. You should be encouraging people to get better, not bringing them down because you're better than them. That attitude has got to go. It's not specifically even straight white dudes who do it. It's just people. The straight-white-dude culture, I don't even let that consume a minute of my day. I just don't really think about the world in that way. I don't experience the world like that."

The Fender Tash Sultana Stratocaster boasts an alder body finished in beautiful Transparent Cherry, complete with matching headstock

"THERE'S NOTHING SPECIAL ABOUT ANYTHING I DO. ANYBODY IS CAPABLE OF DOING IT BETTER THAN ME IF THEY TRY AND IF THEY'RE PASSIONATE. SOME PEOPLE HAVE THAT PASSION – AND THAT YOU CAN'T TEACH"

Learning and experimenting within that process is an integral part of Sultana's music. They trace that restless curiosity back to their school days and view it as one of the key elements of their creativity. "When I was little, I was very easily bored, so to keep up with myself I'd need things to do," Tash explains. "I hated school but I found that a breeze, man. I just thought it was a waste of time because I could have been playing my guitar. We're all human and we're all capable of doing whatever the fuck we want to do. It's just, are you being encouraged to do it?

"I think that makes a real point of difference in the direction of your life. You'll probably stop doing something if you don't have the support. I always had the encouragement from people around me to really give it a crack. I really believed that I was going to get somewhere with it. I didn't think I'd get this far but I thought I would at least be playing music for real to some degree. All these other people can play multiple instruments, why can't I learn to play another instrument? There's nothing special about anything I do. Anybody is capable of doing it better than me if they try and if they're passionate. Some people have that passion – and that's the thing that you can't teach. You can see when somebody really loves something. Somebody could be a better player but do they love it as much? I love seeing that in people."

FIRMA GROUND

Sultana's latest learning curve is *Terra Firma*. Their second full-length is expected early in 2021 and has been ushered in by a group of singles that veer from D'Angelo-style jams to brass-led lounge-pop and introspective acoustic musings. Once COVID-19 hit and wiped Sultana's calendar clean, they pumped the brakes for the first time in a few years, leaning into the empty days they suddenly found unspooling before them. "Might as well write record three with all this time we've got," Tash says, with a laugh. "It was like a roast, where I just cooked it really slowly. I'm happy with it because I feel like I didn't miss anything. I didn't burn out over it. I didn't feel rushed.

"I spent more than 200 days tracking it, two months in the mix process and a couple of weeks mastering. The artwork took fucking ages. But if 2020 hadn't been the way it turned out, I wouldn't have finished it like that. It wouldn't be the way it is. I'm proud of it. If I died tomorrow, I'd love to know that people will hear this and really see that I'm not just a looper. I just like to jam. It's just about the music."

ABOVE The Tash Sultana Strat's four-ply aged white pearl scratchplate accommodates two Alnico 4-equipped Yosemite single-coils and a Double Tap humbucking bridge pickup

OPPOSITE PAGE Personal touches on Tash's signature Strat include a smoking skull motif on the neckplate, and an appropriately gold signature on the back of the headstock

Sultana produces every note of music they release but another major shift in perspective was provided by inviting outside collaborators in for the first time. Singer-songwriter Matt Corby and producer Dann Hume helped bring the busking relic *Pretty Lady* into fresh focus, while rapper Jerome Farah offers a suitably smooth counterpoint on *Willow Tree*.

"I've been on other people's work before but I've never had somebody on mine," says Sultana. "I loved it. I had a couple of songs up my sleeve and I thought, 'You know, this is the time to break out of the same thing and present them to other people's minds and see what they bring to the table'. They're not the same as they were when we did that writing session. I changed a lot of it. But I wouldn't have ended up where I did if we didn't have that to initiate the process. I cannot wait to work with more people, on their stuff, my stuff, whatever. It was sick."

FUTURE STAGES

This all-hands-on-deck spirit will eventually extend to Sultana's stage show. Having made their name as a one-person band, there's now scope for additional musicians to add fresh flourishes to their live palette. "It was just a necessary decision," they reflect. "I said to myself when I wrote this album that I'm just going to let it fly. I'm not going to have any limitations and I'm just going to go for it. I did that. There's just so many sections to the songs that to approach them within looping, it won't really happen.

"I wrote all these parts and had to realise, 'Fuck, you're just going to have to put some other motherfuckers on the stage to make this come to life as it should be'. My setup's going to be exactly the same – I'm going to be a solo artist forever. But for a section of the new show, the band is going to come on and add to what we've already got. Get down with the funk, man."

"YOU DON'T REALISE THE IMPERMANENCE OF EVERYTHING: YOUR CAREER, YOUR HEALTH, YOUR EXISTENCE. IF SOMEBODY HAD TOLD ME A YEAR AGO, 'ALL OF YOUR SHOWS WILL BE TOTALLY SCRAPPED', I'D HAVE THOUGHT IT WAS A WHOLE LOAD OF SHIT"

On *Terra Firma*, the funk is a digital experience. Perhaps speaking to their polymath-style approach to making music, Sultana is a wholehearted subscriber to the gospel according to Kemper and Axe-Fx, running their Strats, Jazzmasters, Gretsches, Matons and a Harmony Jupiter through the powerful profilers. "There are no amps. All of the guitar tones and bass tones are emulated through Kemper or Axe-Fx," they say. "I swayed that way a little while ago because you can have this super-small system in your guitar rack instead of lugging around six fucking amps. So now I can dial in anything I want. The Axe-Fx is so complex that you can literally change the power-supply unit digitally. You can change the mic position – where it would be placed on an amplifier if it was real. It's crazy."

THIS PAGE Sultana performing Brisbane's St Jerome's Laneway Festival in 2017

After a strange and disorienting year, Sultana's music and the way they go about bringing it to life appears to be in greater focus. They're already looking beyond this phase and into what comes next but with a sense of balance on their side that's previously been hard to come by in the midst of one of those meteoric rises we're always hearing about. "There's like two separate people within me," they explain. "There's Taj, which is my normal self, and then there's Tash Sultana. I've noticed that, as time's gone by, those people are totally different. I have been Taj all year long and it's been great because I was really fucking burnt out.

"And then, by applying that to Tash Sultana, I feel like I've cracked the code I've been trying to crack for years. I could never get there. I've just realised that so many things I would reject or overlook or say no to in the past, I've been saying yes to now, because our lives have been changed to an unfamiliar degree. You don't realise the impermanence of everything: your career, your health, your existence. If somebody had told me a year ago, 'All of your shows will be totally scrapped', I'd have thought it was a whole load of shit. There's nothing I can do about it apart from embrace it. I've had some shit days. But all in all, I feel like I'm really prepared to take the next step. I feel like this is just the beginning."

To find out more about the Fender Tash Sultana Stratocaster, visit fender.com

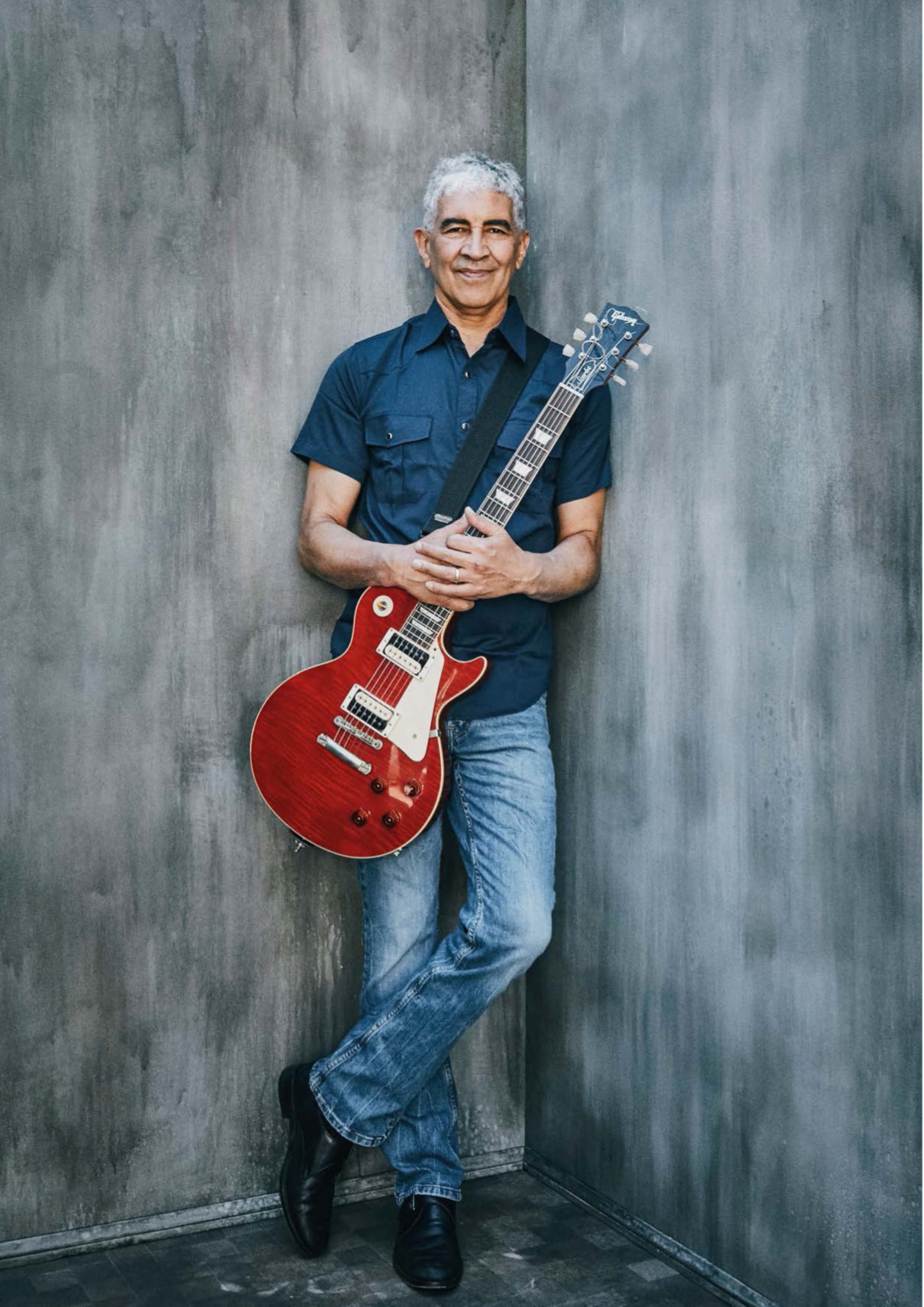
© MARC GRIMWADE / GETTY IMAGES

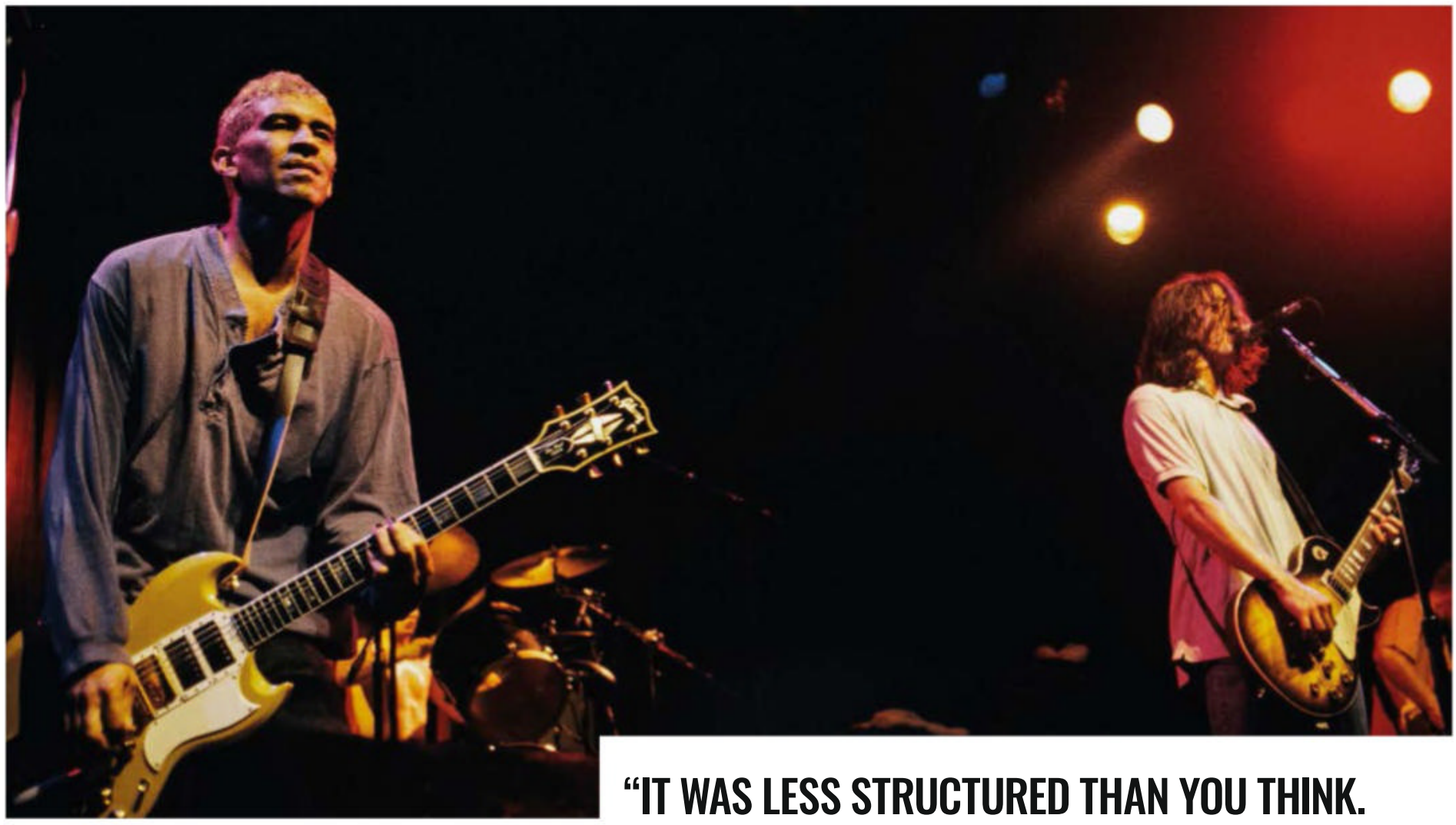
It's been over a quarter of a century since Foo Fighters was born as a vehicle for Dave Grohl's unheard solo material. Now, as they celebrate 10th LP, *Medicine At Midnight,* we caught up with Pat Smear and Chris Shiflett to look back at the guitarists' journeys as part of the biggest band on earth

WORDS PAUL ROBSON

THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

FOO FIGHTERS





© Tim Mosenfelder / Getty Images

"IT WAS LESS STRUCTURED THAN YOU THINK. THERE HAS BEEN A LOT OF HAPPY ACCIDENTS"

PAT SMEAR

When Nirvana touring guitarist Pat Smear first heard drummer Dave Grohl listening to the music that would become the Foo Fighters' debut record in his car, he was impressed and intrigued. Soon he was asking to get involved and, after those demos had become the eponymous first Foos album, Grohl knew he was going to need a band to perform this stuff. Smear climbed aboard with bassist Nate Mendel and drummer William Goldsmith from Seattle act Sunny Day Real Estate and Foo Fighters, the band, was born.

"One day, we were leaving a Nirvana rehearsal, and Dave was sitting in his car playing some music that appealed to me," Smear recalls. "He told me it was some tapes he'd been making and I remember really liking it and saying that I wanted him to play me more. That was the first I heard of it. The second time I heard it was when we were at my house in Los Angeles and he said, 'Oh, I made this tape' and gave me a cassette that was essentially the first Foo Fighters album. I absolutely loved it and it made me want to play music again."

If Foo Fighters had originally been an outlet for Grohl within Nirvana and, subsequently, a place for him to go to deal with the dissolution of that band following Kurt Cobain's suicide, it became something much bigger by the time he'd given Smear that cassette. Smear knew it too; it was clear that there was serious potential here.

"Dave didn't have to ask me to join the band," says Smear. "I asked him! After I heard the tape, I went to him and asked if he was going to make a band, because I wanted in."

That band hit the road to support what was essentially Grohl's solo record but Smear reveals that there was a bit more to it than that. "The first thing we did in the studio as a band was actually mixing the first album," he tells us, "which Dave had recorded by himself. It was a pretty cool thing to bring us in on and we spent a week or so in the studio doing that, so in a way that was our first record even though we didn't play on it."

GOOD MEDICINE

This month, Foo Fighters release their ninth studio album, *Medicine At Midnight*, 26 years after that self-titled debut. Smear is still in the band, having left in 1997 before returning part-time in 2005 and then full-time in 2010, as is Mendel. Goldsmith was replaced on drums by Taylor Hawkins in 1997, while Smear's long-term replacement Chris Shiflett now works alongside the former Germs man and frontman Grohl as part of a three-guitar attack. Keyboardist Rami Jaffee was officially added to the line-up in 2017 after more than 10 years as a touring member. All of which sees Grohl's one-time solo project bestriding the world of rock as a six-piece, often augmented by backing singers and string sections on tour.

Medicine At Midnight is a tight nine-track album that casts off any 'punk rock' assumptions that the short format might suggest to see the Foos exploring new ground, incorporating elements of soul, funk and disco into their well-honed hard-rock palette to create what Grohl has termed a "Saturday-night record". Both Smear and Shiflett admit to being a bit surprised when they were introduced to the new music.

ABOVE Pat Smear and Dave Grohl fronting Foo Fighters at San Francisco's Fillmore, 1995

OPPOSITE Smear clutching his Les Paul – he splits his time between Gibsons and Hagstroms when playing with the Foos these days

© Martin Philbey / Redferns / Getty Images

“WHEN I JOINED, WE HIT THE ROAD RIGHT AWAY. THERE WAS NO TIME TO CONTEMPLATE ANYTHING”

CHRIS SHIFLETT

ABOVE Nate Mendel, Grohl, Taylor Hawkins and Shiflett back in 2002

OPPOSITE The Cleaver, a Custom Shop version of Shiflett’s signature Fender Telecaster Deluxe, is Chris’s first-call guitar

“When I got the demos, I didn’t think it was a radical departure or anything,” says Shiflett. “But it was certainly a little more groove-based. I think Dave had a different idea in mind as far as the vibe of this record, because it chased down some of that 1980s Bowie-sounding stuff. And that’s fun to do, especially for the guitar work.”

“I think the first thing we did was *Shame*,” says Smear, “and things started getting weird and going off the tracks a bit. I mean, I normally play how I play, bring my punk-rock thing. But it became clear that wasn’t necessarily going to work here.”

Shiflett is keen to stress, however, that this is still every inch a Foo Fighters album. “It’s sort of the beauty of having a band that’s been around for a long time and has an identity. It’s like we can’t not sound like us. It’s a blessing and a curse.”

But with a broad new palette to play with, did either player need to adopt any new approaches or bring new instruments to the material?

“I split pretty evenly between Hagstroms and Gibsons when it comes to guitars,” says Smear. “I’d say, on this record, I leaned more on the Gibsons. I can tell you, the Gibson SG is an odd guitar in that I only like the ones that have a tremolo system – it just looks right. But the joke of that is that, with an SG, you don’t need a tremolo system because, as you move, it’s like you’re using a tremolo system, you know? So I did have this one SG that I would put lighter-than-usual strings on specifically for the extra wobble, because if your strings are too light it gives you that certain sound. That’s probably the most gimmicky thing I did on this record, and that features mostly on the harder rock songs.”

Shiflett’s approach remains the same: looking for parts that fit and work within the song. But recording these new styles still brought its share of enjoyment to the process.

“What’s great now and different from when I joined,” he says, “is that, when we record, everyone brings in their special stuff… I’ve got some nice old Fender Tweed combos that I always bring. We have some Marshalls we always use, and I have a hand-wired Vox AC-15 that I use a lot for recording.

“Fender made me a Masterbuilt version of my signature model a while ago called The Cleaver that I definitely used a lot on this new record because I love the P-90s in it. I also bought a really beautiful ’57 Les Paul that started its life as a Goldtop before someone along the way took the finish off to reveal the wood grain. But it is a ’57 Les Paul Goldtop and it’s got the original pickups in it and everything. Those original PAFs are just amazing.”

HAPPY ACCIDENTS

Things have not always been as comfortable and settled within the itinerant Foo Fighters as they are today. Smear’s first studio recording with the band would yield the acclaimed 1997 album *The Colour And The Shape*. The band used several studios, going from what Smear describes as “practising recording as a band” in Seattle to finishing the project over at Grandmaster in Hollywood. “I think that’s probably where Dave got the idea of recording different things in different studios to see how the environment would affect what we record, because we did that so much on that first album together,” says Smear. In 2014, the band released *Sonic Highways*, for which each track was written and recorded in one of eight cities and eight studios, from Nashville to New York, in an effort to explore the music history of the US.

“With guitars I generally just bring what I feel like playing and, with *The Colour And The Shape*, I remember it being the time I first started playing hollowbody jazz-style guitars, and I felt some of the music called for that kind of sound. But it was a lot less structured than you might think – there has been a lot of happy accidents in this band.”

"WHY WOULD WE EVER NOT DO THIS? WE ALL LOVE HANGING OUT AND PLAYING MUSIC TOGETHER"

PAT SMEAR

Smear is now in his second full-time stint with Foo Fighters, and has no plans on calling it a day any time soon

After *The Colour And The Shape*, Smear left the band – and music – but never lost touch with Grohl. "I was really away from music," he says. "I didn't even have a guitar on a stand in my living room. But Dave would play me or call me down to hear new music they'd recorded and that would really get me fired again. I remember with *There Is Nothing Left To Lose*, when I heard that album I thought, 'Ah, man, I can't believe I've missed out on this one'. To this day, it is one of my favourites."

Shiflett feels his pain. "Tell me about it, man," he says. "If I'd joined the band three months earlier, I would have been on that one too!"

Instead, Shiflett joined after recording had wrapped on album three and remembers being handed a cassette a few months before the record's release while in an LA hotel bar after his second audition for the band. "We all got drunk and it felt like I'd got the gig but I hadn't been officially told that. Actually, one of the songs they sent me to learn for the audition was *Aurora*, which is off that record, so I guess that was the first thing I heard. And based on that, I could tell they had made a different record from *The Colour And The Shape*."

Becoming a Foo Fighter was something of a culture shock for the Californian. "At the time I joined, I was playing in No Use For A Name," he says. "We were a punk rock band. We made records and went on tour and all that sort of stuff, and had a little fan base. But, you know, Foo Fighters is on such a bigger scale – even things like not having to carry your own amp at load-in is very different and amazing and kind of hard to wrap your head around at times."

Shiflett was soon whisked away on tour, which proved a learning process in more ways than one. "The beauty of it was that, when I joined, we hit the road right away. There was no time to contemplate anything: they told me I got the gig on Sunday, we played a show that Friday and left for tour on the Monday. And then we went over to Europe and the European part was insane. You know, in my band, I had never heard the term 'promo tour' but it was like a masterclass in the Foo Fighters because I had nothing to offer in interviews. I hadn't played on the album we were promoting. I had literally just joined. So I just sat there day after day in hotel rooms and radio stations and playing TV shows and stuff with the band, just listening to them talk about the band, you know, getting to know everybody on the fly. And we went all over Europe and then we went down to Australia and it was just like bam, bam, bam."

MAKING A MARK

After touring *There Is Nothing Left To Lose*, Shiflett returned ready to put his own mark on the next Foo Fighters record, only to walk into the most turbulent period in the band's history.

Still on the outside, Smear remembers hearing an early version of *One By One*, which would become the band's fourth album. "I heard the first version and I didn't love it," he says, "and I guess they had the same reaction, as they went and rerecorded it."

On the inside, Shiflett was worried that his dream was dying early. "That was a strange period, especially when you're the new guy in the band," he says. "We did the *Nothing Left To Lose* tour cycle, which was great. But at the end of that cycle Taylor OD'd on tour, which is no secret, and so there was the fallout from that and tension between him and Dave. During that time, Dave played on the Queens Of The Stone Age record [*Songs For The Deaf*].

Then we made a Foo Fighters record that got shelved, which was an experience I'd never had before. Then Dave went off to tour with QOTSA. So there was a period there – and it was long, six or eight months – of thinking, 'Is this thing coming to a close?', where I thought, 'Well, that was fun but it's over'. You know, it was very interesting and scary for me."

In the end, that shelved album would become one of the band's best-known, featured some of their most beloved tracks. "*One By One* was totally unlike any record I've made before, even with this group," says Shiflett. "But ultimately it worked. That record had *All My Life* and *Times Like These*, and then we toured our asses off and it all turned out fine."

Looking back on his first recording with the band, Shiflett still remembers his equipment. "The first Foos stuff I recorded, I was still using a 1982 Les Paul that I got for my 15th birthday quite a lot, and when I joined the band, Dave bought me a couple of guitars: a '91 white Les Paul Custom that I used all through those years and still use a lot, and a white Explorer. Then, somewhere along the way, I bought a black ES-335 from Gibson and used it a lot, and definitely recorded with it. Amp-wise we were mostly playing through Mesa/Boogies back then, although Dave would have a few vintage boxes around that we might use."

GOING ACOUSTIC

Back on track, the band's next album would be a double one, with *In Your Honour* featuring a second disc of acoustic recordings. Shiflett remembers being enthused by doing something different with the band but it was the subsequent acoustic tour that proved to be a real turning point. In search of a bigger sound with which to fill the concert halls they would be playing in, Grohl recruited string and percussion sections – and turned to an old friend.

"I was involved with my punk rock band at the time," remembers Smear, "and we had a tour scheduled, so I said, 'Why not come back to me when you do a greatest-hits tour? It will make more sense that I'm there again for that.' But Dave insisted and sent over the schedule for the Foo Fighters tour and not one date clashed, so after that I switched between playing crazy punk rock shows in tiny punk clubs, then hooking up with the Foo Fighters to play these gorgeous theatres. It was a lot of fun to have that experience of such extremes in one touring year. And after that I just never went away."

"I look back at that time as a really big shift for the band," says Shiflett, "and not just because of the fact that Pat came back but because, from that point forward, the band was forever expanding, you know? Because then the touring that we did beyond that incorporated some acoustic, mellower stuff where we had, you know, cello and percussion and keys and Pat, so the band has never gone back to being a four-piece. I think that moment forever changed the band really."

An original guitarist returning to a band to play alongside the guy who essentially replaced him has the potential to be more than a little awkward but Smear and Shiflett are on the same page when it comes to remembering the transition.

"When I did the acoustic tour, I was sitting next to Chris, who I think I had probably met but didn't really know at all," says Smear. "But we had so much common ground – music we liked, boxing, guitars – that we became good friends very fast. We're also very different guitar players, which is what you want when you're in a three-guitar band, so I enjoyed that first time together. After that, it was fun working out how we were going to be in the band together."

Shiflett recalls: "In the beginning, we did spend a lot of time talking and thinking about who's going to do what and working out the parts just to not be all on top of each other. But we don't do that so much now. We just naturally fall into playing different parts. I feel like with our band, Dave is the central guitar player and the stuff that Pat and I do builds off that, so you're trying to figure out what's going to work and what the song needs. We have a lot of people on stage, so sometimes it makes sense to just not play anything because you don't have to have the whole shebang from start to finish. As the old joke goes: Dynamics? I'm playing as loud as I can! I think that can apply to any three-guitar band."

HOME COMFORTS

Smear's first studio album back with the band was 2011's *Wasting Light*, an album recorded analogue to tape by Butch Vig at Grohl's house. Vig recently told *Guitar.com* that he considers that album to be the most accurate studio representation of how Foo Fighters sound live. Both guitarists agree.

© Kevork Djansezian / Getty Images

ABOVE The now six-piece Foo Fighters honouring Aerosmith at the Los Angeles Convention Center in 2020

"It's another of one my favourites," says Smear. "The process of recording that was very comfortable. I was happy recording to analogue and being at Dave's house was very comfortable. But I was really trying to find my spot in there as a guitar player, even though we had rehearsed those songs and knew them well. Sometimes I would play baritone and I would say to our engineer, James Brown, 'I don't know what to play here because there are three of us: I don't want to overpower but I don't want to get lost either'. And he would often come up with amp or pedal combinations that I would play and say that I didn't like the sound of at all. Then he would say, 'Not alone you don't but now play along with the other two and see what you think'. Then I'd be, like, 'Now I get it'. He taught me not to worry about whether I sounded good alone but to think about what sounded good with the other two."

Similarly, Shiflett feels that the old-school, live-sounding *Wasting Light* is an album that gets close to what he loves best about being in Foo Fighters as any other. "I loved making that album," he says. "And I loved that we were limited by tape. One of the things that I think our band has suffered from is too many options and sometimes the songs get bogged down and we keep adding shit until we get it where we want. My own personal taste is the exact opposite of that so the thing I love about *Wasting Light* is that, as a guitar player, you have one track on a song, and you have to build it out as best you can. That was fun. I always love the way our live demos sound and always wish that was a little closer to the end result. It's hard with modern techniques not to keep adding stuff, and there's a place for that, but my personal taste is that I love the way our live demos sound because that's what we sound like in a room, you know?"

BROTHERS IN ARMS

They may have joined the band at different times and under different circumstances but both men admit that it never crossed their minds back then that they would be sitting here as members of a 25-year-old band at the close of 2020. Surely now it feels as though Foo Fighters could go on forever?

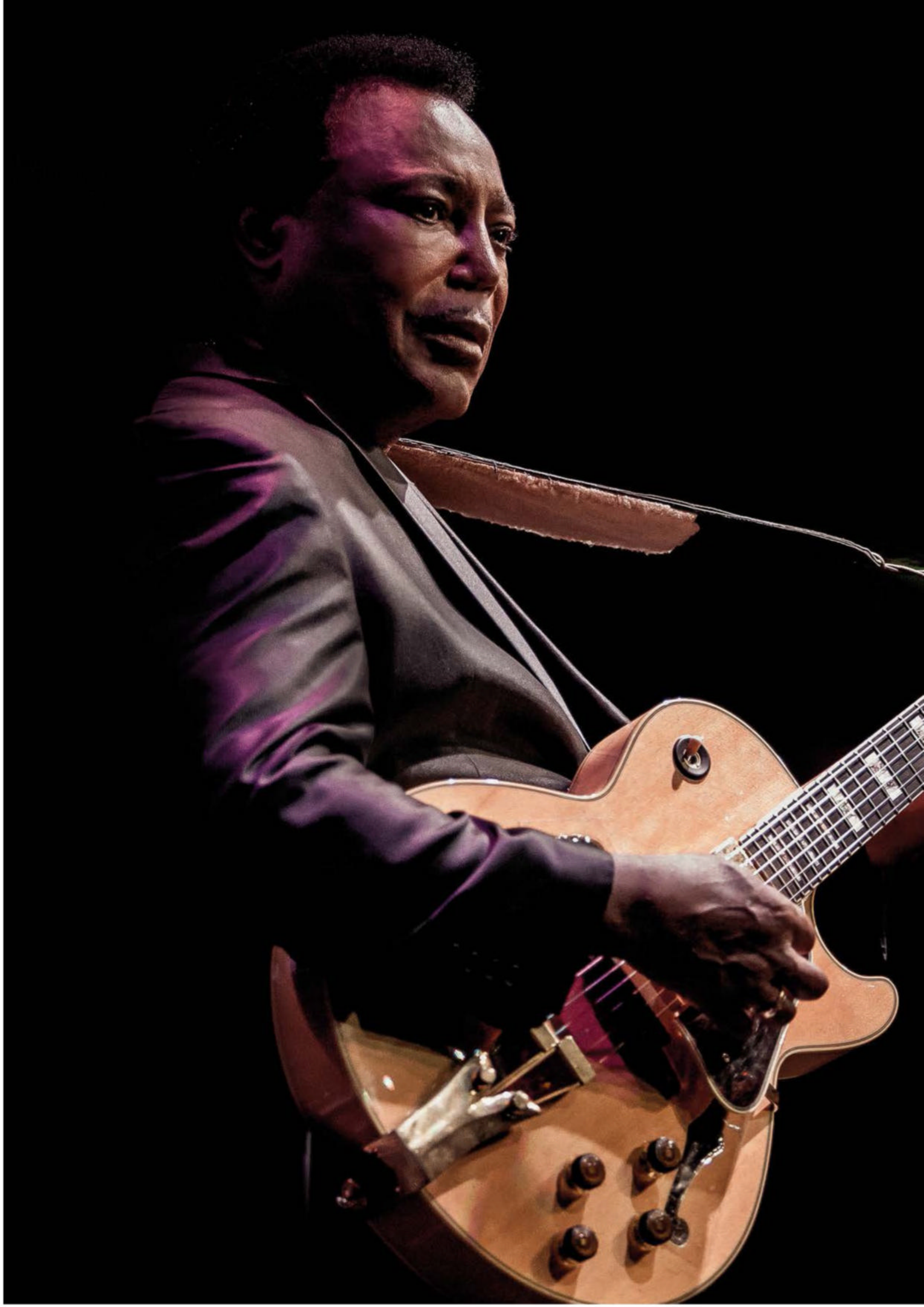
"In a way, yeah," says Smear. "It's more like why would we ever not do this? We're all best friends. We all love hanging out and playing music together. During 2020, when we had such a big stretch where we weren't even allowed to be together, I can't speak for everyone but I think we all felt kind of lost, you know? I want to get together with my boys and do that thing we do! So more than ever, because of 2020 – and here I go speaking for everyone again when I have no right to – we all realise the band is more important to us than we already thought."

"Dave always says it's like your grandparents when they get too old to get divorced," says Shiflett. "We hit that point a while ago. It's like when you finally achieve being a working musician and doing it for a living, it's nothing like you imagined it to be when you were a kid. So, I think, in the same way, when you're 25, you can't really imagine what it's going to feel like to still be doing it at 50, and how our lives have changed so much. We're all parents, husbands and have families. But now, being here, I can imagine it going on forever. Yeah, why not?"

Even if the young Shiflett couldn't foresee where he'd be now, he probably still would have bought a '57 Les Paul if he knew he was going to be in a big rock band, right?

"I think my younger self would have never imagined that would be possible, but would be very pleased with the purchase. No doubt."

Medicine At Midnight is out now on Roswell Records/RCA



UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

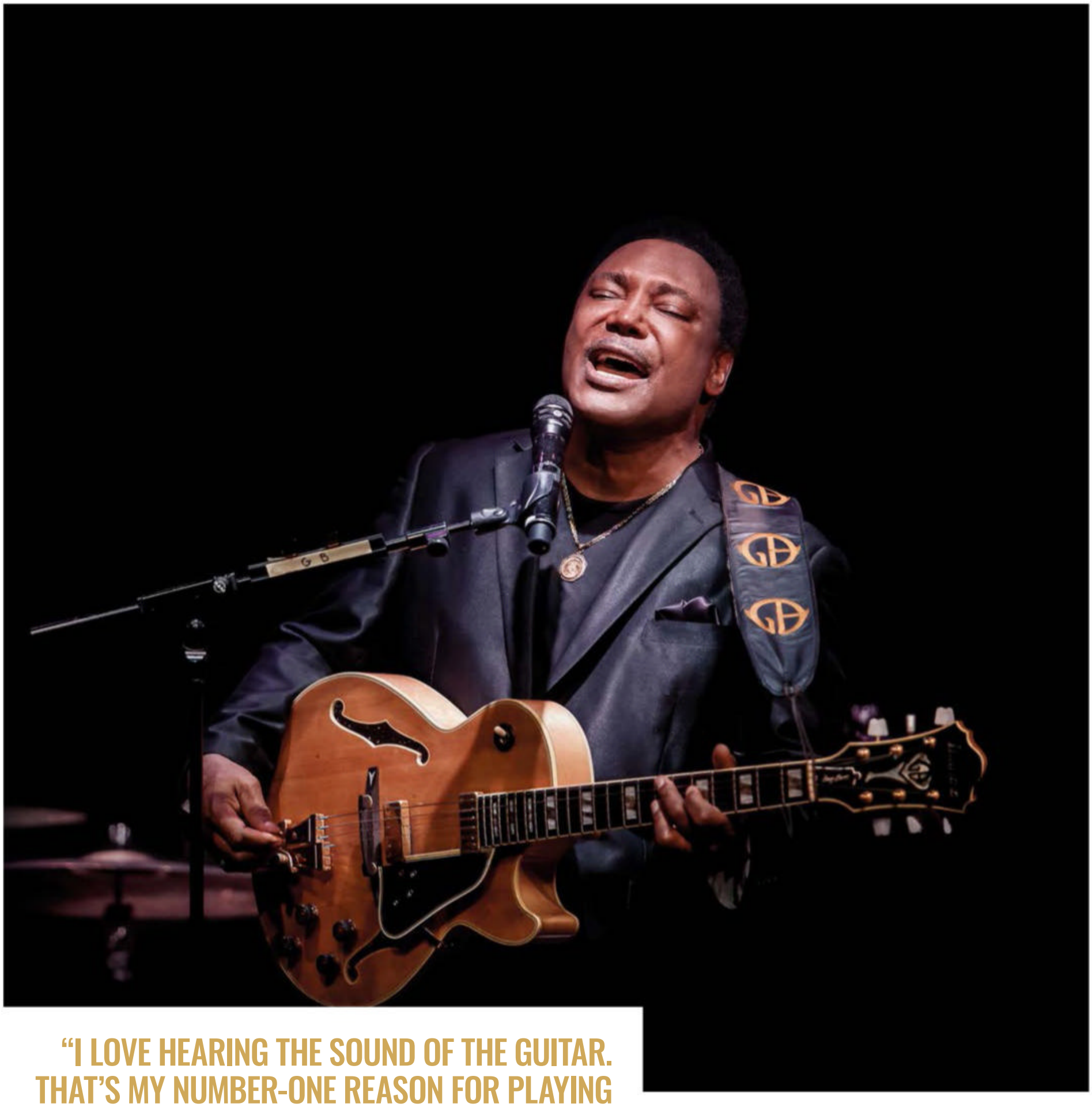
WORDS MARK ALEXANDER
IMAGES CARL HYDE

George Benson's new live album captures an evocative performance from the jazz legend. We catch up with the 77-year-old to talk intimate gigs, signature guitars and the secrets behind his improvisational style

When George Benson breezed into London in 2019, there was no social distancing, no two-metre rule and no face-mask mandates. Instead, an expectant audience of 250 were ushered into the illustrious Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club to witness the Grammy-winning master of jazz at close quarters – and there was a full bar.

It may seem like a lifetime ago but the intimate evening of soul grooves and improvised jazz leads captured on Benson's latest live album *Weekend In London* are as fresh and delightfully zesty as the day they were captured. With the oozing atmosphere of the famed lounge bar providing their sumptuous backdrop, Benson's creamy vocals and chromatic runs lingered in the air as if they were being slowly consumed by the venue itself.

According to Benson, the decadent surroundings played a key role in the evocative 14-track recording. "Well, one thing's for sure: you can't get away with nothing. It's up close and personal," he says. "Ronnie Scott's is a unique place for musicians. It showcases them in a way that very few nightclubs do. It feels like you're on a big stage but you're not. You're on a small stage. People can feel you, hear you and take part in the performance by reacting to what you're doing. I thought it'd be a great place to make a record."



“I LOVE HEARING THE SOUND OF THE GUITAR. THAT’S MY NUMBER-ONE REASON FOR PLAYING IT. AND I DON’T CARE WHO PLAYS IT. I JUST LOVE THE SOUND OF THE INSTRUMENT”

George Benson and his signature Ibanez LGB300 captivating the crowd at Ronnie Scott’s Jazz Club in 2019

CLUB CLASS

Not surprisingly, this wasn’t Benson’s first outing at the esteemed venue. After all, the Pittsburgh native’s storied career began at the age of just seven, playing ukulele at his local corner store for a few dollars a time. In the 70 years since, you’d probably have an easier job listing the pre-eminent venues he hasn’t played than those he has.

But Benson’s memories of his visit to the iconic London jazz club in the 1970s are not exclusively positive. “I played there many years ago,” he says. “I brought a quartet over with me, which featured a young guitar player, Earl Klugh. He was about 17 or 18 at the time. I had a drummer and a bass player. We played there for about a week, maybe two. I didn’t make a dime because I spent all my money on the airplane, getting the band and my equipment over there.”

Putting these financial shortcomings to one side, Benson says that his stint at Ronnie Scott’s was far from a wash-out.

“It turned out to be very entertaining because I got the chance to see London like I’d never seen it before, and I found that I had an audience that I didn’t know I had. On top of all that, just about every night, John Williams, who was the number-one classical guitarist in the world at that time, came to see me play, as did the upcoming John McLaughlin. He and I were almost like rivals. We loved each other’s playing, you know, but we were on different pages. It was an exciting time in both of our careers. So when I hear the name Ronnie Scott’s, it brings that all back to me.”

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Ronnie Scott's was established by the eponymous saxophonist in 1959. As well as Benson, Buddy Rich, Chet Baker and Peter Green have all released live albums recorded here

In fact, Benson is as much a patron of the club as he is a headliner. "You know, I've played London quite a bit over the past 25 years or so," he says. "It's a place that I look forward to because it's almost like a second home to me. I enjoy the wonderful restaurants and nice pubs during the day. But at night I think of Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club, the number-one European jazz club. After I'd finished my concerts, which might have been at Wembley Arena or the Royal Albert Hall, I would go to Ronnie Scott's and I'd hear some incredible entertainment. My favourite was Buddy Rich because he would play drums like nobody you'd ever heard. It was so musical and so entertaining."

More often associated with the grandiose surroundings of the capital's concert halls, Benson's decision to record a live show in the tight confines of an intimate jazz club provides a telling insight into the environments in which he forged his formidable career. The club, with all its limitations, provided a conduit to the past.

"It put us so very close together," he says. "It reminded us of our old rehearsals, when we used to rehearse in tiny places and we were all on top of one another. But that was good because we were able to check out exactly what each other was doing. We didn't have to guess at it. And that wasn't just for effect. It was really about musicianship. I insist that my band be musical. That's the first thing I want to hear from them, and then we go from there."

CONSUMMATE CAREER

Aged 10, Benson was already making records. A decade later, he cut his teeth playing alongside the likes of Brother Jack McDuff and Jimmy Smith. His first solo record, released in 1964, was modestly titled *The New Boss Guitar*. By the 1970s, he added vocals to his slick chops, resulting in a string of hits including *This Masquerade*, *The Greatest Love Of All* and *Give Me The Night*. Mainstream success would catapult Benson's career into a rarefied state but jazz would always be where his heart lay and, in particular, with the guitar.

"I love hearing the sound of the guitar. That's my number-one reason for playing it," he says. "And I don't care who plays it. I just love the sound of the instrument. I practise virtually every day. It takes me back to the days of Charlie Christian with the Benny Goodman sextet. That's what woke me up, and I'm still trying to produce that calibre of musicianship. The difference is that I do my own vocals now.

Benson and his band performing in close quarters at Ronnie Scott’s

vocals are important. Some audiences don’t care that much about instrumentals but they love vocals.”

Benson balances his on-stage duties with an unerring professionalism that denotes a career honed over many decades of performances. Calmly delivering his vocals with a smile, he cradles his full-body signature Ibanez, the LGB300, which follows a line of successful signatures that stretch back to 1978 and the live release *Weekend In LA*, noted for the infectious groove of *On Broadway*.

“I was using an Ibanez copy of the L-5 and, man, that was a great guitar,” he says. “That’s what attracted me to the company in the first place. Ibanez came to see me the night we did that album. They came backstage and said they’d do anything to have me with their company. I had first played one of their guitars in a store after one of my friends, Phil Upchurch, a great guitarist and bassist, told me about them. When I picked one up, I was really impressed with how the guitar was put together.”

Benson agreed to partner with Ibanez on the understanding that they would create a new design. “They asked me if I had any ideas and I said, ‘Yep, I certainly do’. That’s how we ended up with the GB20, which was the first guitar, and the GB10, which is the most popular.”

As a touring musician, Benson was particularly interested in creating an instrument that would withstand the rigours of the tour bus while being discrete enough to store in an overhead locker. The solution was to profoundly scale down the Ibanez body but retain its scale length.

"They told me that if I changed the size of the guitar, it would change the sound and that the sound would get smaller," says Benson. "They said they could correct some of that with the design of the pickups, but inherently, you're always going to lose some low end."

With the full-size big brother GB20 already in the bag, Benson was eager to improvise. "I wanted to experiment with the GB10," he says. "I was so proud to have something with my name on it but I was also happy to be an innovator with the company."

The GB10 has been Ibanez's longest-running artist signature model. More fundamentally, the partnership addressed some key reliability issues that had been frustrating Benson over the years.

"The thing I wanted most, they covered," says Benson, who often toured 40 weeks a year. "I had to go to a music store every week to have my guitar tweaked because something would go down with it. Either the pickups would start rattling or the frets would go out of line or the nut needed honing or the tuning pegs would loosen up. But not on the GB20 or the GB10. You could drop them on the floor, pick them up and play them. Sometimes you wouldn't even have to retune them. That was a boon for me on the road because I was playing a lot."

He was also collaborating. By the 1970s, Benson had already hooked up with the likes of Lonnie Smith, Miles Davis and Stevie Wonder. But his latter-day credits include musical partnerships that range from 2005's *The Great American Songbook, Volume IV* with Rod Stewart to Gorillaz' 2018 single *Humility*. His approach throughout has been epitomised by an unreserved willingness to share and create.

MAKE-UP ARTIST

Benson's latest offering provides a succinct review of his career, delivered from the liberating confines of a jazz club. It's an environment that transports him to a time before chart success and top billing on royal stages. All the hits are there but the performance is far from retrospective. Rather, it is compelling and rests on Benson's remarkable ability to improvise.

"Basically, the whole show is improvised except the melody itself and the ensemble playing," he says. "We play the arrangements to remind the audience what song they're listening to but then we go crazy."

It's infectious stuff that many players find daunting. For them, Benson has some sage words. "Something that happens to most of us is we end up running into a wall," he says, with a smile. "We've practised pretty much everything in our minds and yet we know we haven't reached it yet. That happens to all musicians but especially to guitar players. There are two things that are difficult on the guitar: improvisation and technique. So often you get busy doing one and you forget about the other – then you got a problem. My advice is to listen to other players and see if there's something they're doing that you're not. Find out what it is and the next thing you know, that bridge has been crossed and you're on to the next wall."

***Weekend in London* is out now on Provogue Records/ Mascot Label Group**

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WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

TECHNICOLOR

DREAM

Two of the UK's foremost collectors of vintage Fenders share their stories and buying advice as we enter a candy store bursting with custom colours

The American motor vehicle's impact on popular music and guitar culture simply cannot be overstated. From Robert Johnson's *Terraplane Blues* to Ike Turner's *Rocket 88*, Delta blues and R&B trailblazers named their songs after the futuristic metal machines rolling off the production lines to the north in Michigan. By the end of the 1950s, rock 'n' roll singles such as Eddie Cochran's *Somethin' Else* were distilling the prevailing teenage angst of the era: you had to get the car or you could forget about getting the girl.

By the 1960s, the assembly line principles of the automotive industry had been applied to the recording process and the products of the Motown hit factory began to dominate the charts. Cars and motorcycles had driven their way into the fabric of pop and would remain there for many decades, with their influence extending to musical instrument design and even the names of the instruments themselves.

For example, before changing the course of electric guitar history, Paul Bigsby was a motorcycle racer, who worked at the Crocker Motorcycle Company machine shop as the foreman. It was a shared love of Western music and motorcycles that saw Bigsby and Merle Travis become firm friends and, well, you know the rest. Later, in 1962, as Fender debuted elegant new instruments borne out of the collision of surf music and hotrod car culture, Gibson sought to challenge its primacy in the solidbody market by turning to retired automobile designer Ray Dietrich. Dietrich's past designs included the bubble-topped Lincoln Presidential Limousine used by Dwight Eisenhower, and it was Dietrich who conceived the Firebird's radical lines at the behest of Ted McCarty.

The Firebird was launched in 1963 in a rainbow of custom colours first sported by Pontiacs, Buicks and Oldsmobiles on the nation's new highways – an idea borrowed by Gibson from its modernistic West

ABOVE A beautiful 1965 Stratocaster in Sonic Blue from the Seven Decades collection

FACING PAGE This 1964 Inca Silver Stratocaster with gold harware is almost certainly unique

ABOVE Roman Red from 1959 and Fiesta Red from 1964

FACING PAGE Phil's 1964 Fiesta Red Stratocaster is in time-capsule condition and worthy of a closer look. Purchased in South Africa in April 1965, it remained in the same family from new until being sold by ATB Guitars in the UK in 2020

Coast rival. Fender's custom colour chart had officially launched in July 1961 but, back in 1956, Stratocaster and Precision Bass spec sheets already declared that the instruments were available in a DuPont Duco colour of the player's choice for an additional five per cent. And customer requests for custom finishes on Fenders dated as far back as the early 1950s.

For all the romance of custom-colour instruments and the passport they offer to a defining era of pop culture, for most of us, encounters with an original Fender in Sonic Blue or Fiesta Red are rare. And while the opportunity to see multiple custom-colour instruments under the same roof is rarer still, as luck would have it, we know a guy who knows a guy…

GETTING THE BUG

Students of all things Fender will recognise the name Martin Kelly. Martin is best known in the wider world as the MD of Heavenly Films and Heavenly Songs, but back in 2010, he teamed with his filmmaker brother Paul and guitar historian Terry Foster to author *Fender: The Golden Age 1946-1970*. Few tomes stir up such unadulterated gear lust among Fender fans as *The Golden Age*, and one such fan is Phil Hylander – the writer and producer of the acclaimed documentary rock show Seven Decades.

Martin and Phil bonded over vintage guitars and are currently working on a Rickenbacker book with unparalleled access to the company archives and new photography of all of the Rickenbackers owned and played by The Beatles. We'd been cooking up a plan to visit Phil and shoot some of his guitars for some time and it was Phil who hit upon the idea of inviting Martin to join us and assemble a breathtaking array of custom-colour Fenders comprising from their personal collections.

Before delving into the instruments themselves, we're interested in how Phil and Martin's respective love affairs with collectible vintage guitars began.

"Although it's a chicken-and-egg thing," says Phil, "my collection began very much informed by the chapters of my show. So I knew particular bits of the roadmap and it was informed by a setlist of 70 years of music in my head! But bit by bit, I became interested in oddball rarities. I always used to take pride in owning guitars you wouldn't mind trashing, which I think is the right and just approach! But being friends with Martin has unfortunately given me the illness of collecting guitars for their rarity and mintness."

For Martin, it goes further back. "It was when I was a kid and first got into bands and stuff," he says. "Me and my brother lusted after Fenders but we couldn't

VOLUME
TONE
TONE

Custom colours don't come much rarer than Surf Burst. Sprayed by Dennis Swiden, Phil's 1958 Jazzmaster is thought by some to have been used by Del-Tones guitarist Nick O'Malley but the evidence is inconclusive

afford them. A pre-CBS Strat was £500-600 and that was a lot of money. So I started collecting Vox guitars, which were £80 or £100 for a Teardrop or a Phantom. I think it was one of the main motivators for me to get a proper job, to be able to buy the guitars I'd been window-shopping!"

SONIC BOOM

The first of many guitars to be removed from its case – original, naturally – is a 1965 Stratocaster in Sonic Blue. From the Seven Decades collection, this was a one-owner guitar before Phil obtained it via ATB Guitars in Cheltenham. Like Surf and Foam Green, Sonic Blue is often confused with its close cousin Daphne, and even this Strat's long-time custodian thought it was Daphne Blue when he received it at the age of just 10 in Irvington, New Jersey in 1965.

Decades later, discolouration of clear coats over time and fading can make it even harder to differentiate between the two. "They didn't always have clear coats," says Martin. "They usually did, but custom colours didn't always have a clear coat. Daphne Blue is a *lot* rarer than Sonic Blue. But I think people just really like Sonics so they go after them. It's got a high premium – it's like Fiesta Red, it's a very special colour. It's got that milkiness."

Martin pinpoints 1962 as a pivotal year for custom-colour Fenders. "1962 was the big year," he says. "Offsets were being pushed and the coloured headstock became standard on offset models. Prior to 1962, headstocks were very rarely matched. The world was coming into colour in the 1960s and the guitars were going to match the mood. That said, on the line, the majority were still coming out in Blonde and Sunburst. They gave it another real push around '65-66 and reorganised the chart. The 1960s became even more colourful and you end up with things like Wildwood, which were quite psychedelic, and then Paisleys."

There was also the small matter of a bespectacled British guitarist and his red Stratocaster. "It was the offsets that really started the craze but the British demand for red shouldn't be underestimated," says Martin. "I have an interview with [Fender's then director of sales] Don Randall where he said they couldn't keep up with the orders for red, so that was how the whole Selmer refinish thing came about. Before it was a thing in America, you'd have bands here with matching sets of guitars in the same colour. I interviewed a guy called Ted Lee, who told me he'd done about 250 refinishes on Fenders before 1965 – that was in the north of England. The whole Selmer thing is a bit of a misnomer, because shops would get whoever could do it to do it. You could unbolt these guitars and you could spray them very easily. There are deniers of that, but it happened."

ROMAN REMAINS

One of the rarest guitars in the room here at Phil's London home is his 1959 Strat in Roman Red. Over

"For me that's the only 12-string that ever rivalled the Rickenbacker," says Martin of his pair of 1966 Fender Electric XII models. "I got the Blue Ice one in the early days of eBay, it was just really cheap. The Candy Apple one I traded for another because I had two Lake Placid Blues. The Blue Ice is unfaded, even though it has a clear nitro coat. It's still got the original flatwound strings on it."

the years, thousands of column inches have been devoted to the colour of Hank Marvin's original 'Flamingo Pink' maple-neck Stratocaster but Martin is convinced that Hank's iconic guitar was also sprayed Roman Red before it left Fullerton.

"I've seen 50s Precision Basses in Roman Red with a gold 'guard. I've also seen three Jazzmasters with gold 'guards in Roman Red," says Martin. "A guitar surfaced with 'Roman Red' on masking tape underneath the pickguard and we got a couple of other owners to look under theirs and sure enough, someone else had it, 'Roman Red'. 1950s custom colours are very rare indeed. Fender hadn't standardised it at that point. People were probably asking for a red guitar rather than a particular shade, and Roman Red was what they got. Then the requests for custom colours became more common and I believe Don Randall picked the colours for the first custom colour chart. I'm sure he simply went through all the available car paints and decided, 'That's cool, that's cool'.

"Fiesta Red didn't officially come in until 1960. I'm pretty convinced that the gold-plated Strat that Hank got was the one on the cover of the 1958-59 catalogue. It would have been specially chosen for the catalogue shoot. When the Shads ordered Hank's guitar, they wrote to Fender asking for a guitar like the one on the cover of the catalogue. No-one has ever turned up another one. It's got to be the same one."

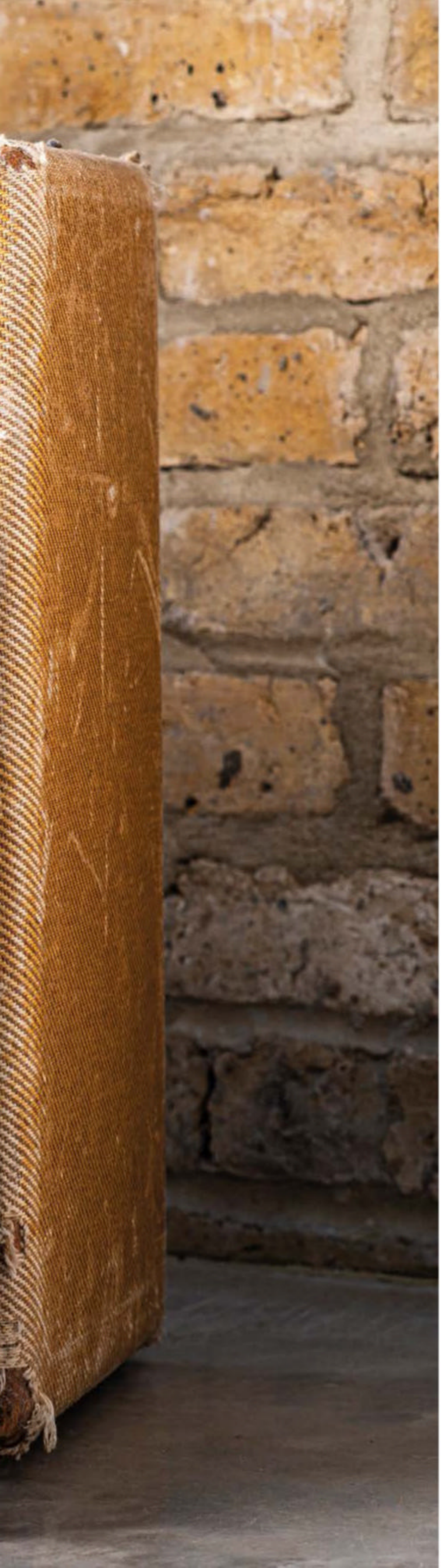
Phil's Roman Red Strat is an early rosewood-'board '59 obtained from Emerald City Guitars in Seattle a few years ago, complete with a seven-inch single cut using this very guitar. "I wanted a pre-custom colour chart guitar with a custom-colour finish, as it's such a rarity," says Phil. "It was owned by a guy called Carl Bukowski, who played in various iterations of a band called the Sentries."

1962 Shoreline Gold and Black Jazzmasters from Martin's collection. "The reason they used that logo on the Black model's headstock is because the spaghetti logo doesn't show up," he explains. "They just got the Jazz Bass logos and clipped them."

Fender
Fender INSTRUCTION MANUAL FOR JAZZMASTER
NORMAL
Vibroverb Amp
FENDER ELECT. INST. CO.
Fender

This 1966 Blue Sparkle Jazzmaster belongs to Phil but was previously owned by Bad Company and Mott The Hoople guitarist Mick Ralphs. It sports the slightly wider fretwire typical of Jazzmasters with dots and fingerboard binding and is an incredible instrument in every respect

VOLUME
TONE



SHELLING OUT

Although Martin and Phil both have jaw-dropping collections, there are still combinations of hues and model years that prove elusive. "I like Shell Pink," says Martin. "It's so rare. I know of a Shell Pink Jazzmaster that I covet! It's a bit of an enigma, that colour. I've only seen two. I've seen one Strat, in Japan. And I've seen the one Jazzmaster that's in our Fender book. I know where that is and I keep saying, 'One day'."

But what about the risk of buying something that's fake? Do these experienced buyers have any tips to offer those of us who are looking to dip our toes into the vintage market but worry about getting ripped off? "It really is buyer-beware on anything these days," warns Martin. "One of the reasons that I like the really clean ones is because they're much harder to fake. When a guitar is really clean, you can easily spot if it's a real finish, whereas with a really distressed, knackered guitar, it's harder to spot. It's the same with antiques – a lot of fake antiques are distressed. It's a good way of covering your tracks!

"Say it's a Jazzmaster, if it's got a real green guard – you can tell when it's a real nitrate guard – they only came on custom colours so you are halfway there. But with a Strat, they all came with green guards. One of the benefits of doing the book was that you held so many that you got a vibe for it."

"A lot of it is experience," admits Phil. "Having not seen the numbers Martin has, you have to be buying from someone whose reputation counts. It's quite hard otherwise, as a civilian. You want to know where the guitar has been for as long as you possibly can. You want to know the origin of the guitar and there's provenance that predates a time when it was worth faking. Like that Blue Sparkle Jazzmaster – we've seen it in photos from the 1970s. It's so unlikely to have been faked between the 1960s and the 1970s. So provenance, I think, is important. When things just appear, it's actually a bit scary. It's the same with cars – you normally want to know where it's been for the past 15 or 20 years. The fewer hands that have tampered with it, the better!"

We wonder how Phil or Martin would react to a part that's gone astray being replaced with a period-correct part that's not original to the guitar. "I want all the parts to hang together," says Martin. "You definitely look for that. Sometimes you think, 'Those knobs look a bit knackered compared to the rest of it'. I want the screws to look right. It needs to be a whole."

"That doesn't mean something put together with original parts isn't interesting but it's not the same as something that left the factory in one piece," says Phil. "I've just sold a Blackguard that didn't have its original pickups and it was, I think, better with the modern pickups it had. I wouldn't have felt any greater psychological reward putting some original pickups in it because the original pickups wouldn't have been native to the guitar. At that stage, you might as well

FACING PAGE Martin has owned this unfaded 1962 Lake Placid Blue Jazzmaster for around 15 years. "I wanted one because Edwyn Collins had one" he says, "but my brother ended up with Edwyn's actual guitar."

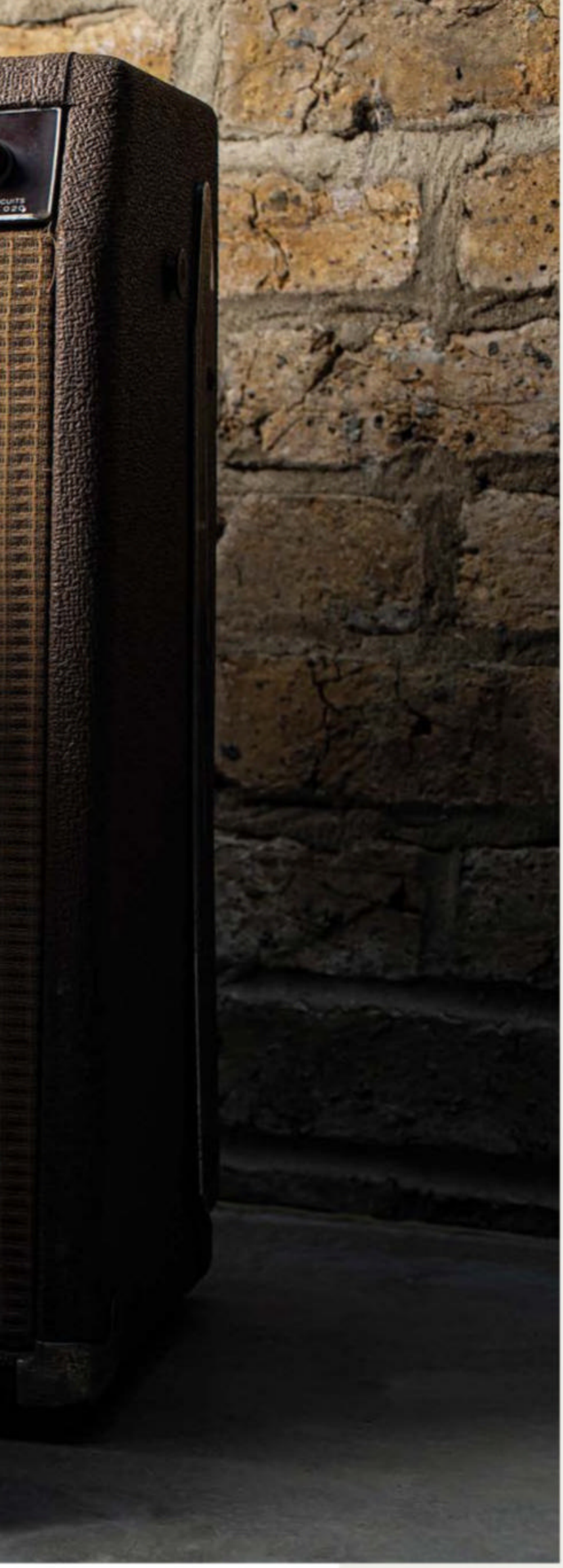
It's rare to see a vintage guitar with gold hardware that remains so untarnished. Phil's 1962 Jaguar also has an interesting grain pattern on the back of its neck. Fender golden-era employee Babe Simoni once revealed to Martin that the most attractive necks would be set aside for guitars with special finishes

have pickups that sound great. That's how I feel about ownership, anyway. If it's not right, it might as well be great! But you can never be sure of where a whammy bar has come from. There's always a little bit of jiggery-pokery. It's okay if the jewellery isn't original as long as it's been replaced with a period one. But a guitar does feel like it wants to be in its case."

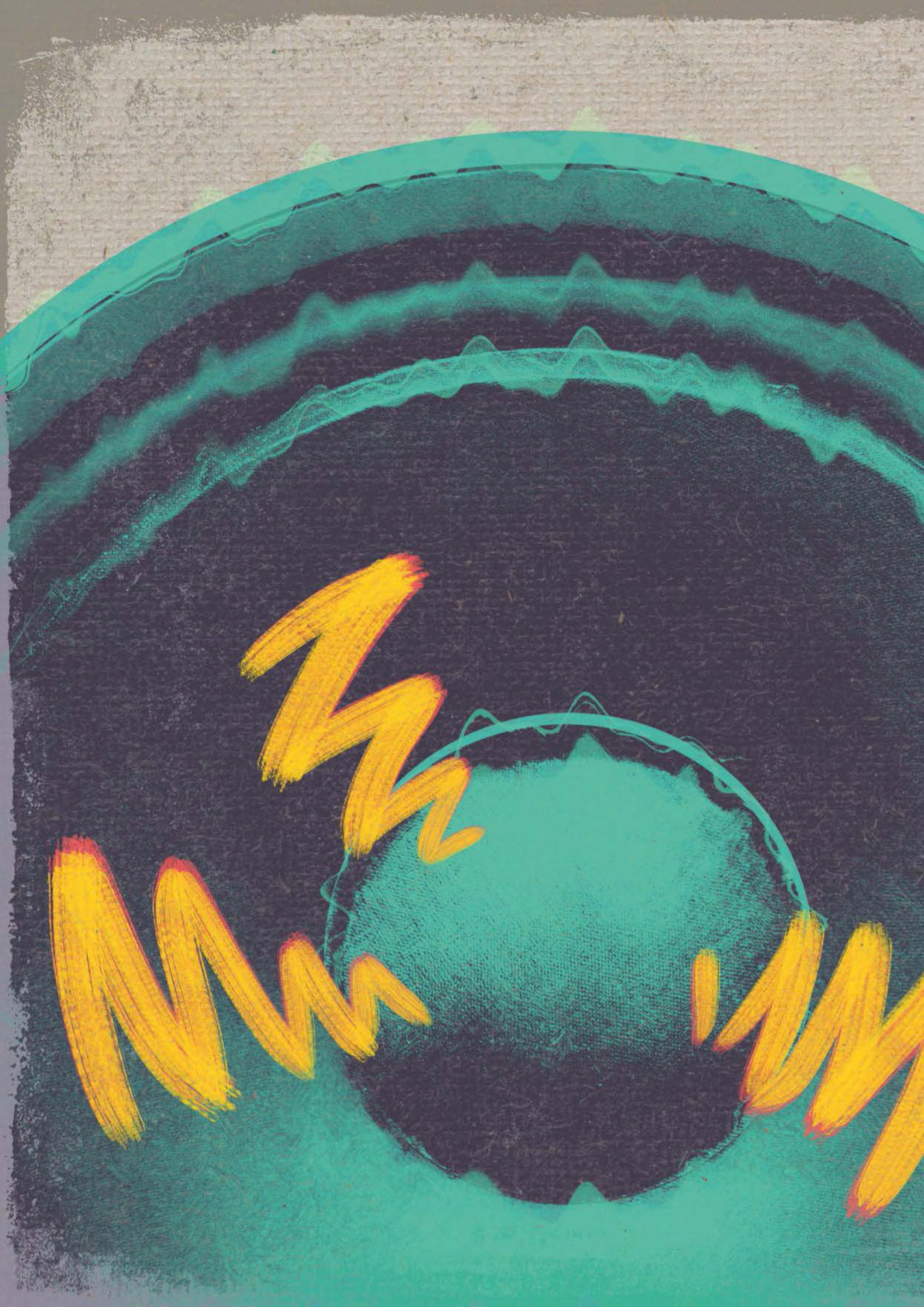
Ah, the case. Only in the past few years have we become aware that vintage guitar cases are a rabbit hole unto themselves. "It's weird how things like that have become so essential," says Martin. "When I was first getting into guitars, people used to take the piss out of me for wanting the original case! But now it's a given."

When all is said and done, the rules seem simple. Guitar a funny colour? Definitely don't paint over it. And don't mislay the whammy bar either. Even if it's broken, don't throw away the case. And that leaflet in the pocket inside the case? Definitely don't lose that, it could end up being worth much more than you realise. G

For more, follow Phil Hylander @sevendecades and Martin Kelly @voxcollector on Instagram



Fender
JAGUAR



DIRTY LITTLE SECRET

Was the ferocious rasp of *You Really Got Me* the first deliberately distorted guitar tone on record? Or was it Link Wray's *Rumble* six years earlier? In reality, heavily overdriven guitar tones were found in blues and R&B long before rock 'n' roll officially took to the airwaves. We wind back the clock to investigate

WORDS TONY BACON

Where would we be today without distortion? Much cleaner? For sure. Much less rock 'n' roll? Maybe. But how did the sound of dirty guitars first invade the grooves of early pop records? A small troop of guitarists led the field, discovering the attraction of filthy tones primarily through accidents, mishaps and serendipity.

Back in the early days of recording, engineers were studiously trained to avoid distortion, so when these pioneers came along and started making an overdriven guitar racket, many of the chaps in charge of the knobs were horrified. Slowly, of course, it dawned on recording personnel that this was a new effect, a new colour to add to the tones available to artists of many and varied stripes. Join us now as we conjure up six significant scenes of ancient audio dirt.

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ABOVE Though Sam Phillips (right) is best known for his work with Elvis Presley, in the early 1950s he presided over sessions that saw unadulterated guitar filth committed to tape

RIGHT Chuck Berry in 1956, one year after recording *Maybellene* in Chicago

FACING PAGE Brothers Dorsey and Johnny Burnette with Paul Burlison (front) of The Rock And Roll Trio. Often attributed to Burlison, some speculate that the influential guitar part on *The Train Kept A-Rollin'* was in fact performed by Grady Martin

MEMPHIS RECORDING SERVICE

MEMPHIS, TENNESSE, 1951

Sam Phillips' Memphis studio became a laboratory for distorted guitar sounds, and an early sign appeared during a visit from Ike Turner and his band in 1951. Masquerading as Jackie Brenston & His Delta Cats, they cut five songs, including *Rocket 88*, a track that musicologists have since deemed a contender for the title of the first-ever rock 'n' roll record.

The lead guitarist on the session was Willie Kizart. Upon his arrival at Sam's place – or somewhere along Highway 61, depending on which version of the story you believe – Willie's amp tumbled from the roof of the car and hit the ground. Once in the studio and plugged in, he figured he was in trouble. An attempt had been made to hold the speaker cone in place by stuffing the amp with paper, and the resulting sound was fuzzy and distorted – someone suggested one of the tubes might also have blown. Willie went ahead and did the best he could, his fuzzed-out guitar riffs powering *Rocket 88* with a sound that marked the debut of deliberate distortion. Phillips, to his credit, had no complaints: "The more unconventional it sounded, the more interested I would become in it."

Before long, more dirt was served up in Sam's studio. Also in '51, Willie Johnson pushed his amp to suitably howling effect on Howlin' Wolf's *How Many More Years*. A few years later, Pat Hare added wild sheets of sound to James Cotton's *Cotton Crop Blues*. In '55 Chuck Berry did about 95 on the distortion scale for *Maybellene*, but Memphis fuzz had set the scene.

BRADLEY FILM & RECORDING STUDIO

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, 1956

Paul Burlison was one third of The Rock And Roll Trio, along with Johnny and Dorsey Burnette. In 1956, they fetched up at Owen Bradley's studio in Nashville for sessions spread over a few days. They say that history repeats itself, so would you believe that something funny happened to Paul on his way to a gig one day? He, too, dropped his amp, which saw a tube come loose. He liked the resulting sound so much that he made his amp do the same thing when he plugged in for one of the tracks at the Nashville session. Or did he?

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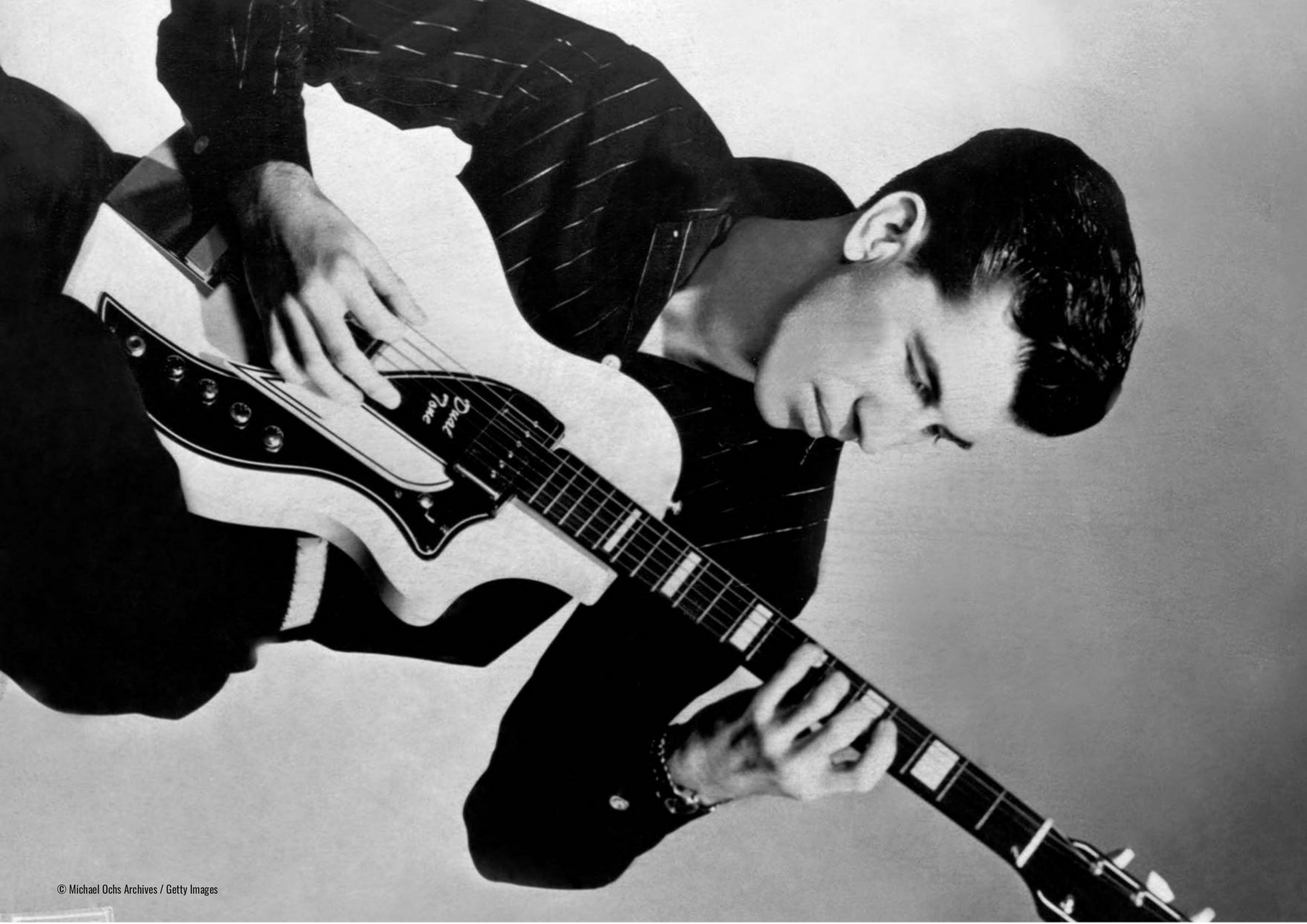

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ABOVE The Kinks performing on *Ready Steady Go!* in 1964

FACING PAGE Dirt pioneer Link Wray with his Supro Dual Tone in 1958, punctured speakers just out of shot

Paul and the Burnettes were a lively trio with a savage sound but, on these Nashville cuts, they were boosted by a drummer and possibly session guitarist Grady Martin. Whether performed by Burlison on his Esquire or Martin on his Bigsby guitar, the grinding doublestops on sweaty '56 single *The Train Kept A-Rollin'* would go down in the history of influential early guitar filth. It would catch the attention of some notable musicians who followed, not least The Yardbirds, who covered it in the 60s and would stretch it out as the basis for one of their extended crowd-pleasing rave-ups.

CAMEO-PARKWAY STUDIO
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA, 1958

Here's a variant on the means to distortion: forget the tubes, consider the speaker cone. As with all of our examples here of the physical abuse of an amplifier, it comes with a special health warning: there's a lot of dangerous electricity going on inside a guitar amp. Link Wray, however, probably wasn't one to read health warnings.

The story goes that at a gig in Virginia, Link Wray & His Ray Men were requested to play a song they didn't know too well. Instead, Link led the band into some unsettling 12-bar improv, during which his amp began to distort – or maybe it was the venue's PA. Wherever it came from, the noise sent the kids wild and the band were requested to keep playing "that weird song".

It seemed a good idea to record this evidently popular outing, so Link, ensconced behind the baffles in the studio, sought to recreate the noise that had so inflamed his audience. The method he hit upon was to pierce small holes in the speaker of his Premier amp, which let out an appropriately ragged noise, and he topped it up with some tremolo at the close. They called the result *Rumble* and it went Top 20 in May '58.

BRADLEY FILM & RECORDING STUDIO
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, 1960

We're back at Owen Bradley's Nashville studio, four years after *The Train Kept A-Rollin'*. This time, there's an ordinary country tune going down with singer Marty Robbins. It's called *Don't Worry* and Marty is crooning that one day love is warm, the next it's cold. So far, so country.

Halfway in, though, there comes a shocking six-string bass solo. Grady Martin arrives again with a heavily distorted tone coming from the Danelectro he uses regularly in Nashville studios for the so-called tic-tac bass sound.

Grady's fuzzed-out solo proves a remarkable noise in such polite surroundings, almost as if the engineer has pushed up a fader linked to a session somewhere else in the building.

The peculiar hubbub came down to a faulty transformer in the studio board but the producer decided to keep it. Early in 1961, *Don't Worry* became a crossover hit for Marty on the country and the pop charts. Meanwhile, the engineer on the session, Glenn Snoddy, teamed up with Gibson and another engineer, Revis Hobbs, to create a unit that could produce distortion whenever required. The result was the Maestro FZ-1 Fuzz-Tone, introduced in 1962 and set to light up the pop charts a few years later.

IBC STUDIO

LONDON, 1964

What were we saying about history repeating itself? It was summer 1964 and Dave Davies and The Kinks went into the studio to record their third single *You Really Got Me*. There was growing pressure on the band because they had already recorded the song a few times in versions slower than the one we know and love today. The record company wasn't keen but The Kinks pressed on.

When Dave walked into IBC on Portland Place, he had alongside him his trusty Elpico amplifier.

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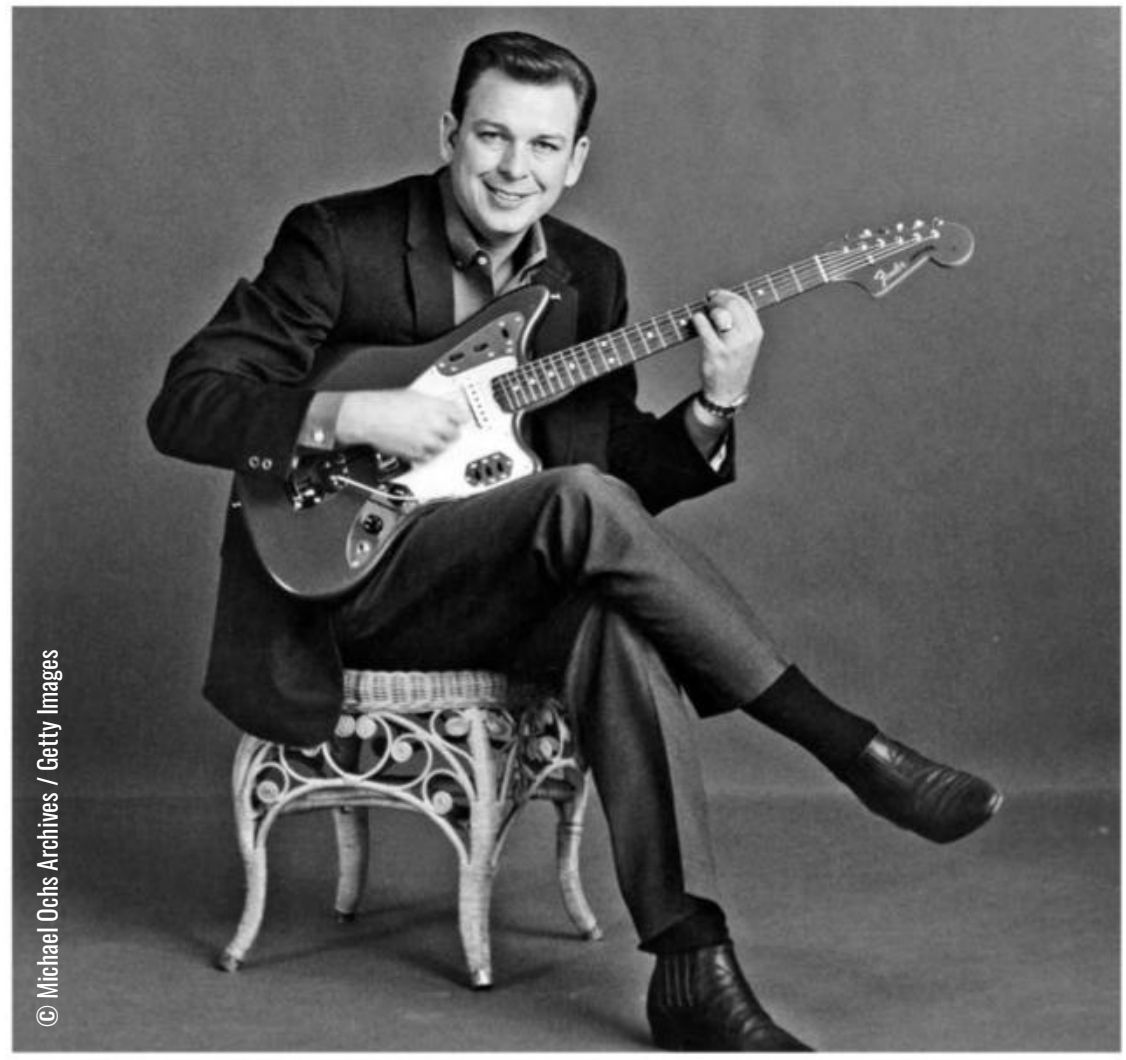
The amp was not in entirely original condition. Some emotional ups and downs with a girlfriend had resulted in Dave taking a razor blade to the amp – so it could've been worse – and he slashed at the speaker cone, echoing Link Wray's efforts a few years earlier. The sound of the abused little Elpico suited Dave's mood: distorted and angry.

Davies would usually connect the transformed Elpico to an AC30 for added volume and that may have been the way he used it for *You Really Got Me*. The distinctive din of his distorted guitar, notably the rasping intro, helped the single to become the group's first chart-topping hit.

RCA STUDIO

HOLLYWOOD, CA, 1965

We've seen the way Gibson's Maestro Fuzz-Tone was developed after a studio accident revealed the attraction of a righteous and fuzzed-up sound.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In 1965, Gibson gave The Rolling Stones a pile of gear, including a brace of Firebirds, several acoustics, some amps and, most importantly for our purposes, a few Fuzz-Tones.

On tour in America, Keith Richards had come up with a simple riff that he thought may work well for a new song the group had tried out at Chess studios in Chicago and then taken with them to the West Coast. He reckoned the riff might become a sort of Stax-style horn line – but then the box of Fuzz-Tones turned up. Now he figured the squawky sound of his guitar through the box could act as a sketch for the horn sound that he could sort out properly later on.

The record company, who needed a single, thought otherwise. (*I Can't Get No) Satisfaction* was released in the States and, a little later, in the UK as an A-side after the Stones completed their US tour. It went to No.1 on both sides of the pond – and suddenly everyone wanted a fuzzbox. At last, distortion had gone mainstream.

A FILTHY STINK FOR TOMORROW

There were others who paved the way by dishing up their own dirty sounds at the dawn of the rock era. We might mention Goree Carter's *Rock A While* (1949) or Grady Martin on *I Just Don't Understand* by Ann-Margret (1961), as well as Billy Strange on *Zip-A-Dee Doo-Dah* by Bob B Soxx & The Blue Jeans (1962). There are plenty more besides.

Today, of course, we have roughly 11,463 different distortion pedals to choose from, and it seems like we have to follow someone else's idea of what a fuzzbox should sound like. Perhaps, however, we ought to try to get back to the old-fashioned DIY approach of these pioneers and come up with our own take on a new filthy sound. We might even, to use Frank Zappa's memorable phrase, add something fresh to "the disgusting stink of a too-loud electric guitar".

ABOVE Billy Strange might look clean-cut but the Wrecking Crew session star's guitar tones could be filthy when required

THIS SPREAD The Rolling Stones performing in New York in 1965. Note the Maestro Fuzz-Tone on stage next to Keith Richards

FACING PAGE Three flavours of the hugely collectible Maestro Fuzz-Tone

VINTAGE BENCH TEST

1967 MARSHALL SUPER BASS

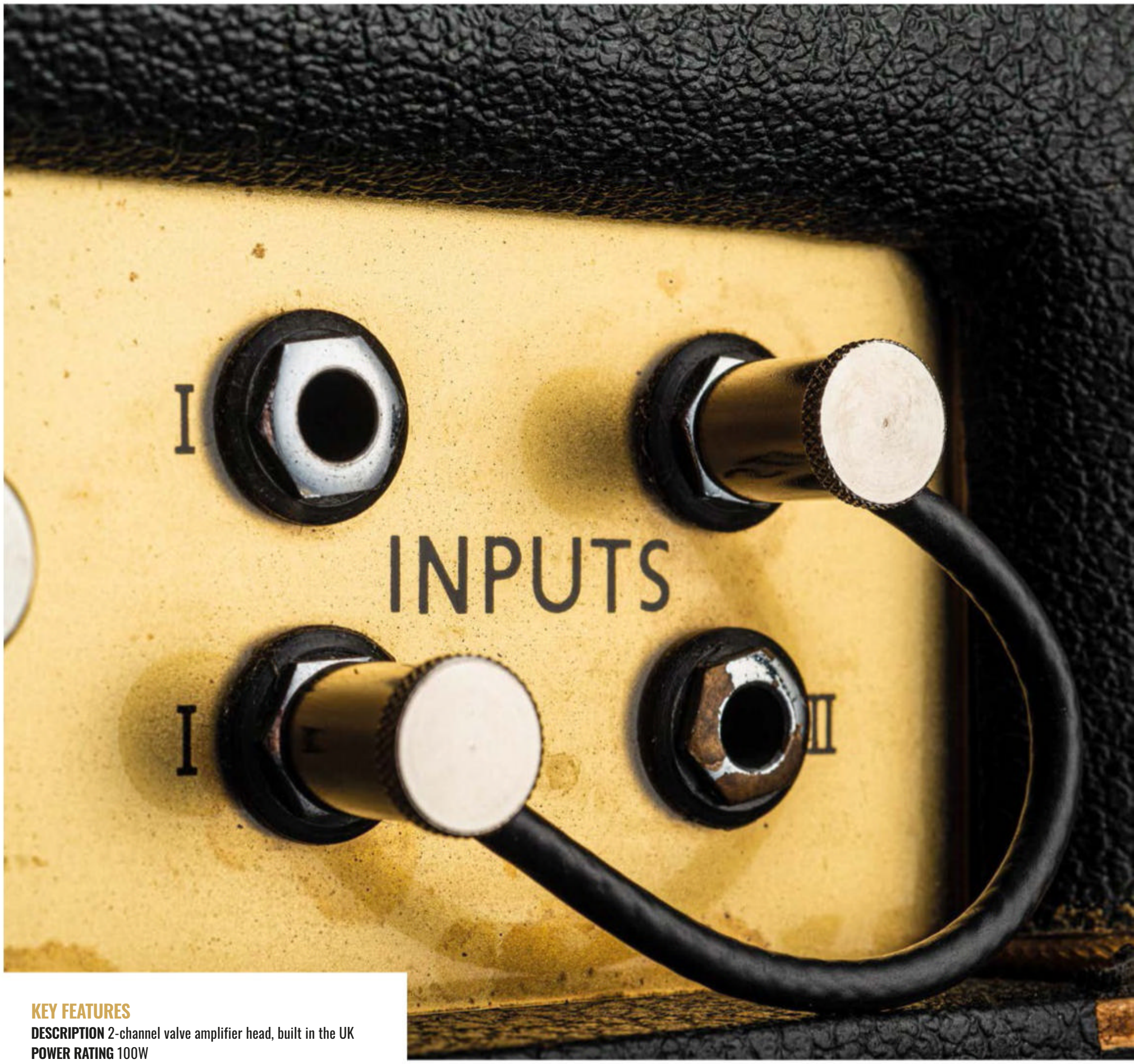
Despite its name, many guitarists regard the 100-watt Marshall Super Bass as the ultimate in vintage Plexi tone. We check out this early example and find out why

WORDS HUW PRICE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

The Fender Bassman provided the early inspiration for Marshall amplifier designs. But, both sonically and in terms of their circuit architecture, they soon evolved into something entirely their own. Marshall's bass amps were arguably more popular with A-list bassists than the Fender Bassman ever was – Jack Bruce, Chris Squire and Lemmy were among their fans – but the Super Bass has always been revered by guitarists too.

Marshall
BASS
MIDDLE
TREBLE
VOLUME I
VOLUME II
INPUTS

Mullard
EL34
BVA
MADE IN
GREAT BRITAIN
SELECTOR
SELECTOR
MAINS



KEY FEATURES

DESCRIPTION 2-channel valve amplifier head, built in the UK
POWER RATING 100W
VALVES 3x ECC83 (preamp), 4x EL34 (power amp)
FRONT PANEL Power on/off, standby, presence, bass, middle, treble, high volume, normal volume, 4x inputs
REAR PANEL 2x speaker outputs, voltage selector, impedance selector, 2x fuses
DIMENSIONS 737 x 290 x 210mm
WEIGHT 18.5kg/40.8lb
CONTACT Follow Vintage Tone Factory on Instagram @vintagetonefactory

This Super Bass – the JMP 1992 Super Bass 100, to use its full model name – is an early example and comes courtesy of Vintage Tone Factory, a boutique guitar recording studio that specialises in, among other things, remote reamping.

Accurately dating 1960s Marshall amps can be problematic because there was no coherent system of serial numbers until July 1969. Instead we have to look towards the amp's features for practical clues. There's a clear 'SB' stamp on the rear of the chassis (no prizes for guessing that it stands for Super Bass) followed by a number that closely corresponds to other Super Bass examples that have been identified as 1967 models.

Marshall's earliest 100-watt bass head was the JTM 45/100 model, which had 'Super 100 Amplifier' on a white rear panel and the word 'bass' adjacent to the speaker impedance selector. By 1967, there was a black flag JTM logo on the front panel, with a gold Plexi rear panel adorned with 'Super Bass 100'. The model designation was soon changed to JMP with black lettering on the front panel but the Super Bass 100 label was retained.

Marshall also transitioned from aluminium to steel chassis in late 1967, and this example is aluminium. Large rubber cabinet feet replaced smaller grey feet in 1969 too. Even though this amp features modern feet, remove them and you can still see grey residue leftover from the smaller originals.

ABOVE Linking the channels with a patch cable is an old-school trick that adds enormously to the tonal range

FACING PAGE Mullard EL34 power valves were fitted in the Marshall factory so it's fantastic to see this amp with a full complement

ABOVE LEFT Mains power is connected via a Bulgin socket but, though it's original to the amp, there are safer options if you plan to take a vintage Marshall on the road

ABOVE RIGHT This Super Bass has a square indicator light – when it's lit, reach for that attenuator

ABOVE The earlier white rear panel was replaced by this gold Plexi panel adorned with 'Super Bass 100W' in 1967

Further clues can be gleaned from the circuit. Marshall's earliest JMP Super Bass models inherited the larger power supply board of the JTM 45 Super 100. The JTM rectification diodes were located centrally between eight sideways-mounted 32mF RS filter capacitors. Marshall later moved the diodes closer to the power transformer, just before changing the model designation to JMP. All the evidence, then, suggests that this amp was made in 1967. It's almost certainly one of the very earliest JMP Super Bass 100 amps that Marshall made.

Although the amp's original handle, its black Tolex and its gold piping remain in decent condition, especially considering their age, the back panel is unfortunately missing. Were it present, it would provide some physical protection for the valves. The issue there is that these amps run hot and keeping the back open is probably more advantageous for home and studio environments.

Relatively little work has been done on the circuit board over the years but it can be difficult to identify the components that actually have been replaced, as Marshall tended to use whatever they could get hold of. Almost all of the carbon film resistors look original and, rather than the fabled 'mustard' signal capacitors, this amp features grey RS types that appear to be factory fitted. Two of the filter caps, two signal caps and V1's cathode bias cap are certainly replacements, and one of the speaker output jacks has been changed. Other than that though, this amp remains remarkably original throughout.

How come the likes of Paul Kossoff, Eric Johnson, Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page and John Frusciante chose to use a Super Bass rather than a Super Lead? Super Bass enthusiasts will no doubt cite its more tempered aggression, its warmer tones and more pedal-friendly front end. Consequently, the Super Bass has developed something of a cult following, but the differences

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ABOVE The paint is now pitted behind the clear plexiglass

FACING PAGE, TOP In this era, Marshall circuits were constructed on turret board and the blue and white 0.1uF capacitors here differ from the Super Lead's 0.022uFs

FACING PAGE, BOTTOM The ceramic valve sockets are chassis-mounted

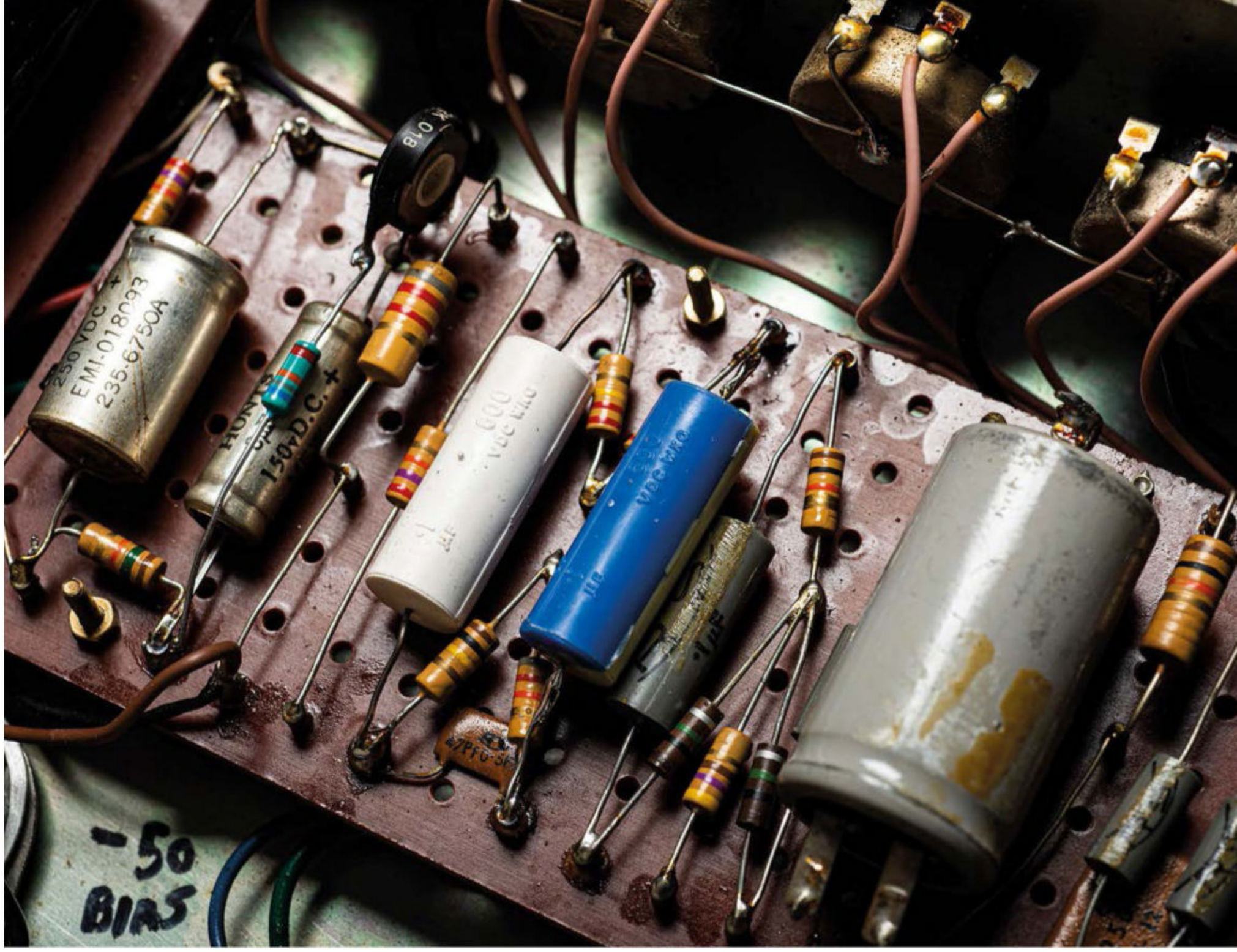
between a Super Lead and a Super Bass amount to little more than a handful of components, and turning one into the other is relatively simple.

Broadly speaking, the differences are as follows: the Super Bass's first preamp tube's cathodes share a cathode bias resistor and capacitor but the Super Lead's V1 cathodes each have their own. Moving through the circuit, the Super Lead's volume one control has a 500pF bright capacitor wired across it and there are minor component value differences in the tonestack – most notably a 500pF capacitor on the treble control instead of 250pF.

Finally, the signal caps coupling the Super Bass's phase-inverter plates to its power valves are 0.1uF rather than 0.022uF, which passes more low-frequency content.

IN USE

These amps were made in an era before volume level restrictions and more widespread understanding of the causes of long-term hearing damage. The Super Bass is a dangerous amp because it sounds so gloriously sweet that you may not notice how loud it is until your ears start shutting down. Within minutes of testing, our ears are telling us it's time to connect an attenuator.


250VDC +
EMI-018093
235-6750A
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-50
BIAS
480V
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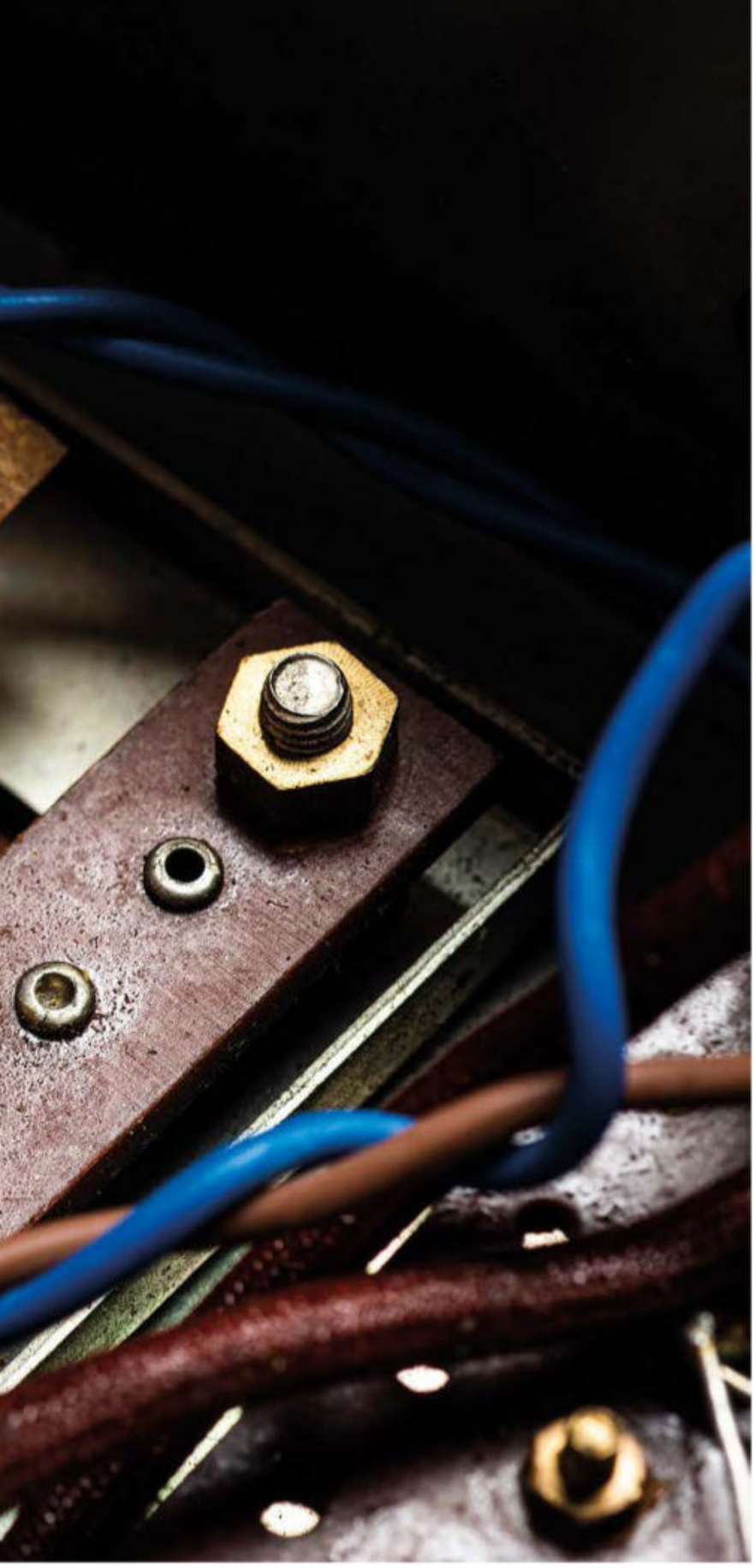

Context is everything. When bands were playing stadiums and festivals in the late 1960s, often without sound reinforcement for the guitar amps from the PA system, amplifiers with this sort of power were a necessity rather than a luxury. Happily, players these days have the benefit of innumerable attenuation and speaker-simulation solutions that make it possible to tame these beasts, even in home-recording scenarios.

Having so much output power means that there's a lot of clean headroom to play with here, and the Super Bass's versatile and powerful tone-shaping makes it an outstandingly clear and full pedal platform. Linking the channels with a patch cable between the bottom-left and top-right inputs adds to the versatility; mixing in some of channel two bolsters the bass and lower mids, and is especially useful in combination with single-coil guitars. The volume increases gradually until there's a sudden rush and the underlying growl becomes a roar.

ABOVE Of the eight original RS filter capacitors, only two needed replacing

FACING PAGE, TOP Vintage Marshall fans are picky about transformers and this amp retains its original ironwork for power and output

FACING PAGE, BOTTOM This 1K wire-wound resistor looks like it has a 'JTM' stamp but the letters are actually VTM, denoting the UK company, which is still in business

ABOVE A Marshall 4 x 12 cabinet loaded with Celestion Greenback speakers is the ideal match for a 100W Super Bass

The overdrive sounds huge, even when attenuated, and with a set of PAF humbuckers, the sustain and harmonic bloom are berserk.

But the characteristic that impresses us most about this Super Bass is its dynamic response. The first amp this correspondent owned was a 1972 Super Lead and its transients were so spiky that it was actually painful and intimidating to play. The Super Bass, on the other hand, is nothing like that because, despite solid-state rectification, it always has a responsive feel along with a musical natural compression. There's almost limitless potential for inspiration here.

If upper-midrange aggression, shrill treble and unforgiving dynamics spoiled the big-box Marshall experience for you, then the Super Bass might make you reconsider. Glistening Hendrix-style cleans, 1960s blues-rock crunch, classic hard rock – the Super Bass can do it all.

As long as you are strong enough to lift one, modern technology has made high-power amplifiers a viable option for gigging and recording again. This thrilling amp is the best vintage Marshall we've ever played and it makes some of our favourite low-power amps feel like mere toys. Sometimes more truly is more.

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REVIEWS

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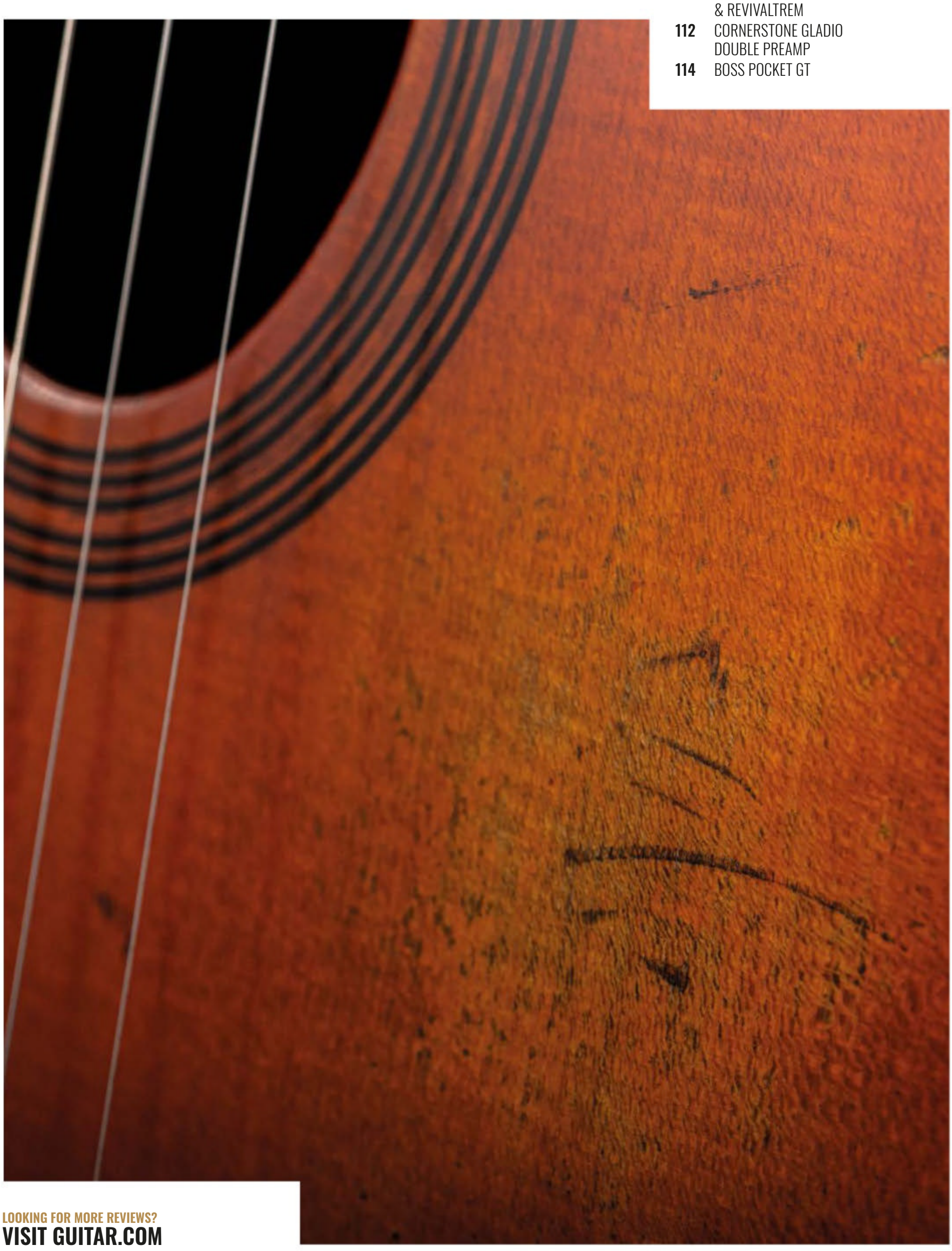

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Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

EPIPHONE
1959 LES PAUL STANDARD

WORDS HUW PRICE

The Inspired By Gibson line has already raised the bar but could this Custom Shop collaboration be the best Epiphone Les Paul ever?

Les Paul enthusiasts are all about the details. Perhaps more than any electric guitar subculture, its members will debate metal alloys, plastic formulations, neck joints and pickup specifications ad infinitum. It's nerdy, for sure, and the average guitar player might understandably be indifferent to details such as switch tips and scratchplate bevels. However, when it comes to the stuff that really matters, such as tone and playability, getting the small things right can turn an ordinary Les Paul into a great one, irrespective of price.

BURST ON A BUDGET?

Deluxe Reverb-Amp
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SPEED
INTENSITY
FENDER ELECT. INST. CO.
TREBLE

Under the covers: the BurstBuckers offer a range of classic Les Paul tones

The latest addition to the Inspired By Gibson range, Epiphone's limited-edition 1959 Les Paul Standard is the first collaboration between Epiphone and Gibson Custom. There's more on how that came about in our accompanying interview on p95 but suffice to say that the result is a well-made Epiphone Les Paul of Chinese origin equipped with components and features you'd usually only find on Gibson's American-made guitars.

The headline news is the choice of pickups. Though the ProBucker units on Epiphone's regular Les Paul Standard 50s are no slouches and we found them to be particularly impressive on their debut in early 2020, this 1959 model has been fitted with a set of USA BurstBuckers. There's a BurstBucker 2 in the neck position and a slightly hotter BurstBucker 3 at the bridge. Both have unpotted coils and unpolished alnico II magnets.

The controls are hand-wired 1950s-style, with CTS 500k pots mounted directly onto the body and Mallory 150 tone capacitors. There's even a USA-spec Switchcraft toggle switch and the only deviation from vintage specifications is the plastic-insulated multicore switch wire. However, we're confident it has no detrimental effect and the enamelled metal switch cover denoting the guitar as a limited-edition model is a classy touch.

Flick the switch: the three-way toggle is a Switchcraft unit

With the exception of the Indian laurel fretboard, the construction materials here stick to Gibson's time-honoured recipe. The mahogany back is centre-jointed and we're pretty certain it's a two-piece, but the Cherry finish is too opaque around the edges to say for sure and it almost obscures the maple under the binding in the cutaway.

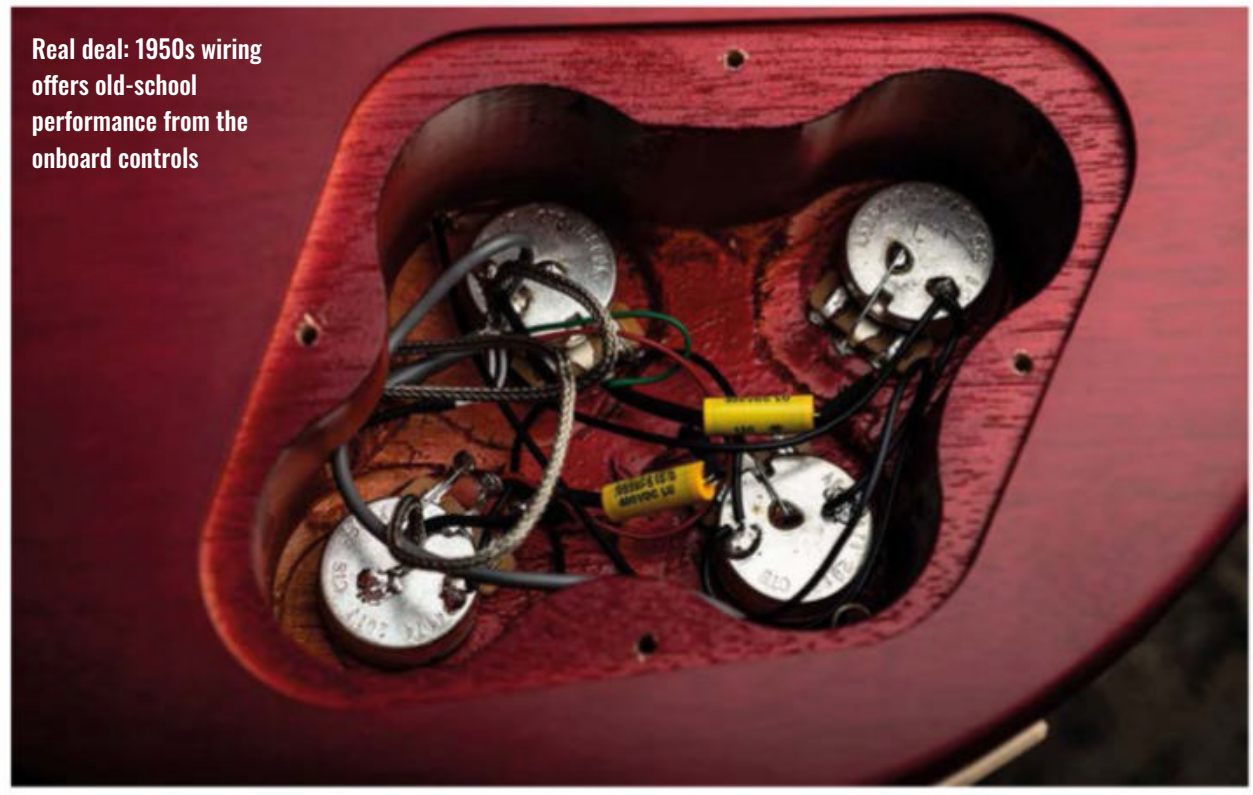
The neck is mahogany too, and it sports a vintage-style long tenon, a stacked heel and an interesting variation on a scarf joint for the open-book headstock. The headstock wings are glued on after the main section of the headstock is attached, potentially strengthening the joint and concealing the scarf joint when viewed from the sides.

Although there's a carved hard maple cap, as you'd expect at this price-point, the figured top is a veneer. The chevron figuring is attractive and the Aged Dark Burst is very well executed but the jury is still out on the satin finish and some of the binding scraping looks untidy.

Plastic fantastic: the non-bevelled pickguard will please fans of vintage Les Pauls

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £749 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string solidbody electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Solid mahogany body with maple cap and figured maple veneer, cream binding, set mahogany neck with long tenon, bound Indian laurel fretboard with 12" radius, 22 medium-jumbo frets, Graph Tech NuBone nut
HARDWARE Epiphone LockTone ABR Tune-o-matic bridge and stop bar tailpiece, Epiphone Deluxe 18:1 tuners
ELECTRONICS BurstBucker 2 (neck) and BurstBucker 3 (bridge) humbucking pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone controls, 3-way toggle pickup selector
SCALE LENGTH 24.76"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 42.7mm at nut, 52.9mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.5mm at first fret, 26.1mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.3mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.93kg/8.66lb
LEFT-HANDERS No. Left-handed versions of the Epiphone Inspired By Gibson Les Paul Standard 50s are £549 (all finishes)
FINISH Aged Dark Burst satin (as reviewed), Aged Dark Cherry Burst
CONTACT epiphone.com



Real deal: 1950s wiring offers old-school performance from the onboard controls

IN USE

This neck is unequivocally on the girthy side and if you don't like fat neck profiles you're not going to like this one. Happily, we feel the opposite about Les Pauls with vintage aspirations and Epiphone deserves kudos for opting for a characterful carve with the potential to polarise opinion.

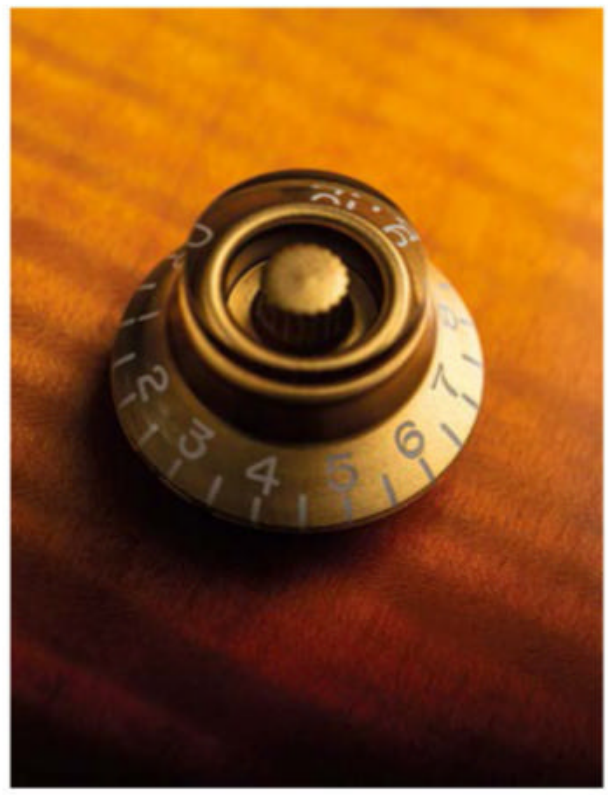
The profile differs from all the late 1950s Busts we've played; it's a fraction squarer in the shoulders and, rather than a very subtle V, this is more of a deep C. On balance, it's closer to the feel of a 1957 or '58 Les Paul and, while not as refined as the real deal, it's comfy and enjoyable to play.

The overall weight of our review guitar is ideal too. For comfort and tone, we like Les Pauls to tip the scales at somewhere between 8.5 and 9lb, and this example is bang-on. That's not a hard and fast rule and there are always exceptions but, if a Les Paul is too heavy, its dynamics can be compromised and if it's too light, there can be a detrimental impact on definition and sustain.

Clearly this Epiphone is in with a fighting chance and it immediately exceeds expectations. The unplugged tone has a clear yet mellow voice and plenty of woodiness but the characteristic that really excites us is the extraordinary sustain.

We begin our amplified testing with clean settings on our Princeton-style Rift PR18 and the BurstBuckers easily capture the guitar's inherently woody tones and epic sustain. With their slightly mismatched coils, these pickups are certainly PAF-flavoured,

Board games: trapezoid inlays feature on the laurel fretboard, which has a lighter hue than rosewood



if somewhat veiled in their treble response. With the BurstBucker 2 and 3 combination, you also get a pleasing contrast between the neck and bridge settings.

The bridge is fatter, louder and more aggressive. There's defined attack, a hint of nasal cocked-wah through the mids and decent sensitivity. Over on the neck position, we get a rounder, softer and clearer tone. There's no shortage of power and its naturally louder location makes it easy to balance it with the hotter bridge unit.

A distinct middle setting tone usually distinguishes really good dual-humbucker guitars from those that are just ordinary and again our Epiphone impresses. We can hear the phasey quack we always look for and, notching back the neck volume slightly accentuates the effect, just as we'd expect from a vintage Gibson.

The potentiometer and tone capacitor upgrades made to this guitar certainly pay dividends when it comes to responsiveness, as well as seriously effective sonic shaping.

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Making headlines: the Gibson-like lines of the Kalamazoo headstock are easy on the eye

Deluxe treatment: the 1959 LP features Epiphone Deluxe vintage-style tuners

The tone controls have a very wide range and accurate feel, and overdriven tones clean up without losing clarity. 50s-style wiring is a minor detail but it's bafflingly rare to see it done authentically.

In a Marshall mood, we fire up Universal Audio's fantastic Plexi Classic plugin, and things start to get heavy. The BurstBuckers cut through the crunch and the guitar establishes beyond doubt that it's a serious Les Paul. It's also a welcome reminder that BurstBuckers are still able to hold their own. We actually prefer these to some boutique PAF replicas we've tested.

Epiphone's 1959 Les Paul Standard has tonal depth, singing sustain and a wide range of voices. The controls work as they should – which is no small thing – and it's a delight to play. We have minor cosmetic concerns but when you factor in the specs and the pink-lined vintage-style hard case, it's a very tempting package.

At £200 less, the Inspired By Gibson Les Paul Standard 50s still comes highly recommended – especially if you prefer a gloss finish – but buying one and upgrading it with a set of BurstBuckers and a quality hard case would end up costing more than the 1959 model.

The '59 also seems like a smart purchase when you compare it to what's available at the most accessible end of the Gibson USA catalogue. The stripped-down, humbucker-loaded Les Paul Special Tribute is £899 but the entry-level carved top model is the Les Paul Tribute (£1,099). The latter features a satin nitrocellulose finish, faux body binding and ultra-modern weight relief, as well as 490 pickups, a maple neck and a premium soft case. In comparison, Epiphone's 1959 Les Paul Standard has more vintage-accurate specifications, higher-spec electronics and comes with a more robust case, leaving you with enough change to add an Inspired By Gibson Les Paul Junior to your collection too. Food for thought indeed.

9/10 **With all the upgrades taken care of at the factory, this is a viable alternative to an entry level USA Les Paul and an excellent guitar in its own right**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gibson Les Paul Tribute **£1,099**
PRS SE 245 **£729**
Vintage V100 Icon **£419**

Epiphone product manager Aljon Go hints at more collaborations in the future

STANDARD BEARERS

To get the backstory on Epiphone's first collaboration with the Gibson Custom Shop, we catch up with the brand's product manager Aljon Go and director of R&D Richard Akers

What inspired Epiphone's tie-up with the Gibson Custom Shop?

Richard: "We'd been talking about having an upscale Les Paul with our head of product development Mat Koehler, who is from the Custom Shop. He suggested we should collaborate to do it right. Since the new ownership has taken over at Gibson, there's a much greater spirit of collaboration between the various teams. The Custom Shop helped us to refine a lot of the details and I oversaw the product development from a technical standpoint."

On which areas did you focus?

RA: "Our regular Les Pauls are nicely built, high-quality instruments but we wanted to pay attention to the details that guitar geeks would appreciate. For the 1959, we're using very high-quality components and the build includes the 1950s long neck tenon. We also made some refinements to the plastics and used 1950s wiring. It's a nuanced thing but it has a big effect on the way that the controls interact."

And the aim was to recreate a 1950s neck profile?

RA: "Absolutely. I worked with the Custom Shop to hone in that neck profile. We wanted it to be authentic and it's a nice chunky but comfortable neck."

What was the thinking behind the satin finish?

RA: "We were shooting for that aged, worn-in look. Also, the finish is thinner than the gloss poly we usually use and that works great for resonance. It's not an open-grain matt finish, we just took the shine off."

Will laurel fretboards be a permanent feature on Epiphone guitars?

RA: "There's a possibility that we will revert to rosewood but we have found laurel to be a superb substitute. It sounds right and it looks the part. As long as the CITES thing continues and shipping concerns are what they are, we'll stay the course."

Could making Epiphones too good could conflict with Gibson's entry-level guitars?

Aljon: "No. I think the key is giving players choice. If they want a made-in-the-USA Gibson, they have something that is accessible with nitro lacquer. But if they want more vintage accuracy, great locking hardware, something that looks the part and is ready to gig out of the box, the Epiphone is a great alternative. And you get a case with a pink lining! Yes, it's built overseas but it's a premium guitar."

Will we see more collaborations between Epiphone and Gibson?

AG: "As the walls between our Gibson and Epiphone business units started breaking down, all of us worked as a think-tank to come up with new ideas. We found a kindred spirit in Mat Koehler and he was able to advise us on how to make great guitars even better. This is the type of synergy you're going to see from us moving forward."

RA: "Our Chinese factory has really hit their stride. A lot of those guys have been working for us since the factory opened in the early 2000s so they have a lot of experience."

AG: "Some actually worked at Gibson before moving to Epiphone. Guys with decades of experience in the US are now living in China and working at our factory. They oversee all of our production. Richard and I remain dedicated to the Epiphone brand and making the best guitars in the company's history."

For more, visit epiphone.com

The brand's director of R&D Richard Akers was closely involved in the design process

Objet d'art: the headstock is topped off by this attractive Art Deco logo

EASTMAN
DM2/v

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Is this elegant gypsy jazz guitar a Hot Club time machine?

Almost a century on from its inception, there's still something about the infectious rhythms and swooping solos of gypsy jazz that captures the imagination. This is due in no small part to Belgium's dapper guitar legend Django Reinhardt, whose fretboard pyrotechnics remain the gold standard. In an appeal to the pencil-moustached jazz hero in all of us, Eastman Guitars has released this DM2/v model, a rosewood and spruce guitar that, thanks to its Antique Varnish finish, certainly looks the part.

The 1930s were a fascinating time in the guitar's history. As players around the world continued to push the boundaries of the instrument, the connecting theme throughout was a need for more volume. In this interim period, before the widespread use of reliable amplification, guitar makers developed ingenious designs to give their instruments more punch.

In 1932, French company Selmer paired up with Italian luthier Mario Maccaferri to produce a new design with a large D-shaped soundhole and an internal resonator. Though the relationship between the luthier and Selmer would only last a couple of years, the firm continued to finesse the design until the release of the instrument now known affectionately as the Petite Bouche, due to its small oval-shaped soundhole. This was Reinhardt's guitar of choice and is the basis for the DM2/v, with Eastman going deep on the authenticity front in terms of both specifications and aesthetics.

A spruce soundboard with an Indian rosewood back and sides is, of course, a classic combination for acoustic guitars. In the interests of vintage accuracy rather than cost-saving, the rosewood here is laminated and has a beautiful, straight-grained figure. Eastman's artful ageing aside, the Sitka spruce used for the soundboard is of good quality with some subtle cross-silking.

At the heart of a manouche instrument is the 670mm scale length and domed ladder-braced top, coupled with a tailpiece design that drives the floating rosewood bridge. All are present and correct here, as is the elegant 'drop' cutaway. Also pleasing to gypsy jazz traditionalists will be the walnut neck and ebony fretboard, topped with the requisite zero fret and slotted snakehead headstock.

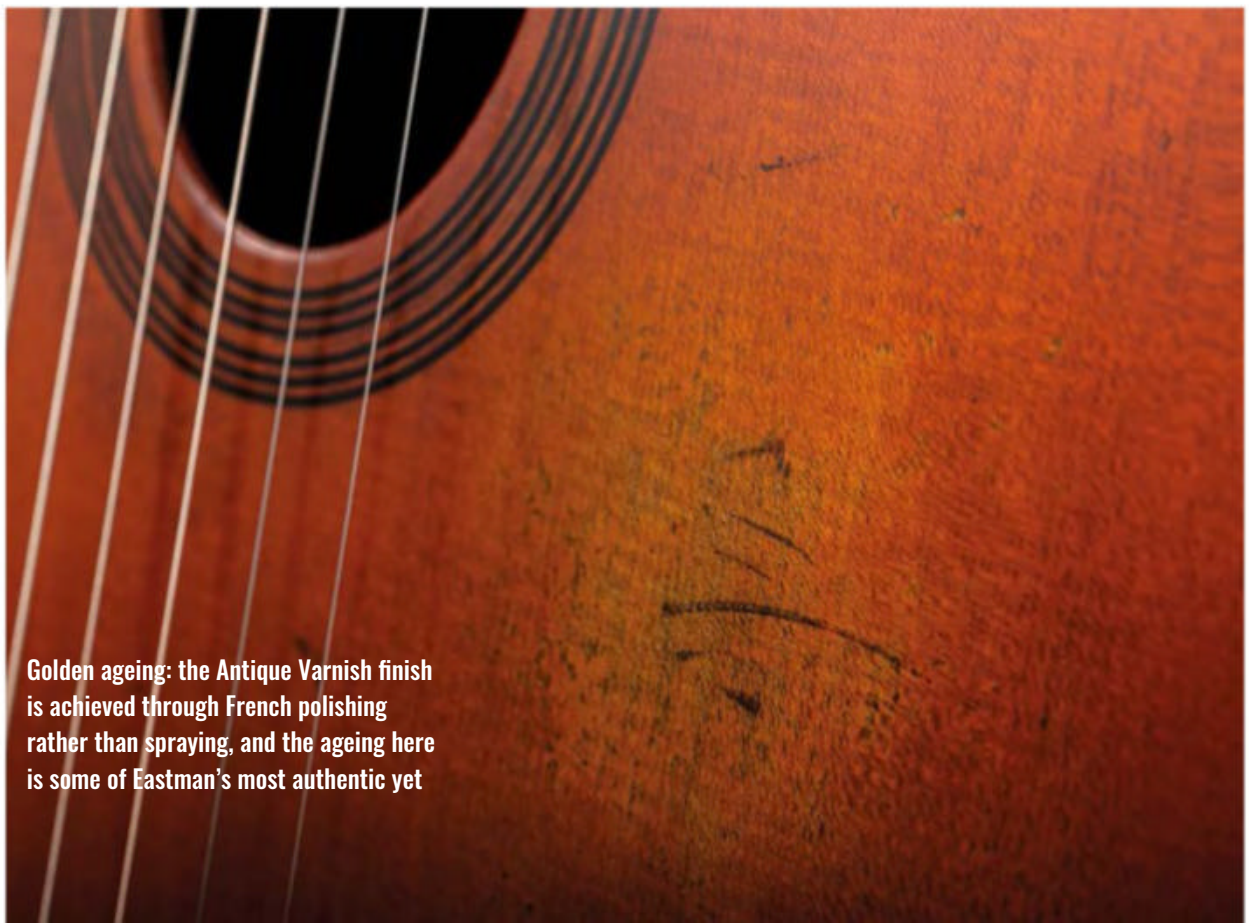
The Eastman logo in this case is framed by an attractive decal that borrows from the Art Deco look of the original guitars. The pearl dot position markers are well inlaid but, before you begin playing, beware: these guitars traditionally have a dot at

Old school: like the Selmer originals, this Eastman features a laminated back and sides

the 10th fret rather than the ninth, which can really ruin your rendition of *Minor Swing* until you get used to it.

The Eastman comes with period-correct chunky neck specifications, which include a shouldered flat D carve and gleefully high action, a vital part of the gypsy jazz sound. Thankfully Eastman has opted for a kinder 1.75-inch nut width – some of the originals came with 1 7/8-inch telegraph poles and we're simply not macho enough for that sort of thing.

While relic'ing has not been welcomed in the acoustic guitar world with the same degree of widespread enthusiasm as it has among electric players, it feels fitting and sympathetic here, with an attractive dark honey patina to the top alongside some appropriate scratches, dings and scrapes.



Golden ageing: the Antique Varnish finish is achieved through French polishing rather than spraying, and the ageing here is some of Eastman's most authentic yet

Inspired choice: the DM2/v was developed in collaboration with gypsy jazz guitarist Doug Martin, whose knowledge and collection was instrumental to the R&D process

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,549 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string gypsy jazz-style acoustic guitar, made in China
BUILD Ladder-braced and curved solid Sitka spruce soundboard, laminated Indian rosewood back and sides, walnut neck with flat D carve, ebony fretboard with flat radius, zero fret, drop cutaway, 14-fret body join, rosewood floating bridge
HARDWARE Gotoh SEP 780 nickel open-gear tuners
ELECTRONICS none
SCALE LENGTH 670mm
NECK WIDTH 45.4mm at nut, 56.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21mm at first fret, 24mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 38.4mm at nut, 53.4mm at bridge
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Antique Varnish
CONTACT eastmanguitars.com

So much so that, at first glance, the only visual anachronisms we detect are the open-gear Gotoh tuners. As all insatiable guitar nerds know, it was upon the headstocks of the original Maccaferri guitars that the world's first sealed 'oil-bath' machineheads appeared. Aside from that, it's genuinely surreal to think that this guitar was completed just weeks ago in a workshop in Beijing.

IN USE

Having lit a slim panatella and selected a silk cravat, we approach the DM2/v with a heavy pick for an enthusiastic performance of *Sweet Georgia Brown*. At the first chord, the guitar springs to life with a dry, throaty bark that rattles the ribs and surprises with the sheer depth of its low-end response. C'est si bon!

Manouche guitars are meant to be hit hard and that demands an action that's high enough to allow the strings to move without choking on the frets. It's a delicate balance that has been well judged here, with a height of 2/32 inches on the treble side at the 12th fret. There's no getting around the fact that, even with the use of relatively light loop-end strings (the tailpiece can also accommodate ball-ends), this guitar will present a challenge to players more used to today's slinky acoustic actions. But it's all part of the experience.

Scrambling our way through *All Of Me*, we find the playability to be closer to that of a vintage guitar than a modern Petite Bouche made by a luthier such as Maurice Dupont or John Le Voi, artisans whose work represents the apotheosis of the style. While the essential character is present here, some of the sonic nuances of a stellar (and correspondingly pricey) handmade manouche instrument are absent.

It's in the single-note lines of *Nuages* that we hear the first real signs of any limitations in the Eastman design. In an ensemble setting, a Grand Bouche is often used as a rhythm guitar, with a Petite Bouche such as the DM2/v tackling lead duties. But, while chord and doublestop approaches yield great results, solo lead ideas lack a little immediacy and the treble-string timbre becomes slightly watery as you venture further up the neck. That said, despite its looks, this is a young guitar whose response will likely improve as it loosens up.

The manouche instrument remains an important albeit niche member of the guitar family and, in the DM2/v, Eastman has created a guitar with much of the charm and personality of the original vintage models. It's just the thing for those *Nuits de Saint-Germain-des-Prés*.

8/10 **A characterful and stylish recreation of a classic design**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

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Gitane DG-300 John Jorgenson **£1,199**

VOLUME
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FENDER ELECT. INST. CO.

On the same page: Epiphone's Inspired By Gibson models sport the open-book Kalamazoo headstock

EPIPHONE
INSPIRED BY GIBSON ES-335 FIGURED

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS HUW PRICE

Following in the footsteps of 2020's hugely impressive Inspired By Gibson solidbodies, Epiphone has turned its attention to the mighty ES-335

The addition of semi-solid and acoustic models to Epiphone's Inspired By Gibson series is both inevitable and welcome. It's all about giving players much more of the Gibson look and feel at an affordable price so, in common with the Inspired By solidbodies, this ES-335 has the open-book Kalamazoo headstock and hand-wired CTS control pots. The block markers and impressively flamed maple on the front and back mark this out as the ES-335 Figured model – plain tops and dots are available elsewhere in the range.

This ES-335 will get you noticed and the factory deserves credit for the finish quality. We particularly like the soft transition from the 'raspberry tea' into amber, and the flame maple veneer is nicely enhanced on the front and back of the instrument. Confining the shading to the body edges is very much an Epiphone feature – the Gibson inspiration here doesn't extend to a 'teardrop' burst, though you will find it on the Blueberry Burst and non-figured Vintage Sunburst incarnations.

We're sadly obliged to point out some inaccurate binding scraping. It's actually slightly better on the back than the front of the guitar but in places the binding is so thinly exposed that it's barely visible. It's a pity because in all other respects the binding on the body and neck is very well applied. The body – and in particular those Micky Mouse ears – would look even better with a more strongly defined outline.

Epiphone's LockTone Tune-o-matic bridge and stop bar tailpiece are nickel-plated to a high standard and the bridge is easy to adjust thanks to screwdriver slots in the posts. The Alnico Classic Pro humbucker covers match perfectly and are mounted in black rings so that they co-ordinate with the reflector knobs.

The bridge pickup's mounting looks fine but the neck pickup ring is unusually shallow and tapers down to little more than 2mm at the end of the fretboard. As a result, the neck pickup sits at an extreme angle relative to the strings, making the cover a few millimetres lower on the neck side.

The aforementioned headstock has a crown inlay and vintage Kluson-style tuners. We can offer no objections to the attractive Indian laurel fretboard and the block inlays have been executed perfectly. The fretwork

In lockdown: the ES-335 has a LockTone Tune-o-matic bridge and stop bar tailpiece

is similarly impressive and we'd describe the 'medium jumbo' fretwire as tall vintage with a bit of extra width.

The neck isn't especially deep but it's so rounded that it fills the hand and feels quite chunky. Overall the guitar has a solidly built feel and, despite a hint of neck heaviness, it balances nicely whether you're playing seated – as the majority of us are these days – or standing.

IN USE

The unplugged tone is bright and rings clearly with long sustain. That said, the overall sound and dynamic response is more akin to a loud solidbody than a vintage semi. The woody mellowness you hear from old ES-335s isn't particularly apparent here and the neck profile doesn't have an old-school feel. However, the playability is excellent, the fretwire is well chosen and the tuning is remains stable.

Once we plug into our Rift Princeton Reverb-style test amp, that hitherto elusive ES-335 tone finally begins to emerge.

Block party: the small block inlays have been fitted perfectly

Time for tea: the Raspberry Tea Burst transitions from reddish brown into golden amber

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £549 (inc padded gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Thinline semi-hollow electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Bound maple-ply body with AAA flame veneers, maple centre block, mahogany set neck, bound Indian laurel fretboard with small block inlays, 22 medium-jumbo frets, Graph Tech NuBone nut
HARDWARE Epiphone nickel-plated LockTone Tune-o-matic bridge and stop bar tailpiece, Epiphone Deluxe tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Alnico Classic Pro humbuckers, 2x volume and tone controls, 3-way pickup selector
SCALE LENGTH 24.7"/628mm
NECK WIDTH 42.8mm at nut, 52.9mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.5mm at first fret, 24.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.3mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.78kg/8.33lb
FINISH Raspberry Tea Burst (as reviewed), Blueberry Burst
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT epiphone.com

The pickups are extremely clear and very sensitive, and they boast power without being excessive, with each of the three settings sounding distinct.

Beginning in the neck position, the tone is vocal, rounded and sweet but also pleasingly well defined even in the lower registers. Providing contrast, the bridge has a convincingly vintage midrange quack, wiry bite and a touch of twang to balance out the grunt.

For many ES-335 players, the middle setting is where much of the magic lies. Here, our Epiphone demonstrates a rather funky phasiness with a more compressed response. It's a superb rhythm tone and ideal for textured chord arpeggios. All of this is enhanced by controls that offer plenty of usable range.

Overdriven tones can be backed off for vibrant and clear clean sounds and, just as you would with a vintage Gibson, you can roll the neck volume back a touch in the middle setting to hit what we often refer to as the 'quack point', which delivers vocal and expressive lead tones for solos and provides a fuller alternative to bridge pickup rhythm tones when it comes to band mixes. As for the tone controls, they roll the treble back evenly and smoothly, proving useful throughout their entire range rather than just a narrow band towards the bottom.

We were massively impressed with all three of the Epiphone Inspired By Gibson solidbodies we reviewed in early 2020. The weight, neck profiles and finishes were so good that all three guitars were just a set of hand-wound pickups and a hardware upgrade away from giving their Gibson-branded counterparts a legitimate run for their money. Thankfully it's much the same story with this ES-335.

Though the instrument falls short of the acoustic character that sets the very best ES-335s apart – which perhaps has something to do with the relative complexity of semi-solid builds – that's quickly forgotten once it's plugged in.

The neck carve perhaps isn't as well matched to this model as the profiles were on the Epiphone solidbodies we looked at last year and, on balance, we prefer a 'teardrop' sunburst on an ES-335 body. But the latter is purely an aesthetic preference and there's clearly nothing fundamentally wrong with this Epiphone take on the ES-335. It's a thoroughly enjoyable guitar with a build quality and standard of finish that exceed expectations at this highly competitive price point.

9/10 **The Inspired By series is a massive step up in looks and build quality for Epiphone, and this ES-335 is a fine addition to it**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Höfner Verythin Standard CT **£599**
D'Angelico Premier DC **£719**
Eastman T386 **£1,049**

Going electric: onboard Fishman electronics make this guitar ideal for the stage

CORT
CORE-OC MAHOGANY

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Simple, affordable and built from solid woods, at a crowded price-point, this might be one of the best buys out there

While there are myriad convincing arguments for the exploration of various soundboard woods, many players (this reviewer included) have fallen for the dark, woody charms of an all-mahogany instrument. It's at guitarists like us that Cort's new Core-OC Mahogany model is aimed, although spruce-top and all-blackwood configurations are also available, with solid woods employed throughout the range.

This lightweight cutaway electro is made from a member of the mahogany family, most likely khaya or sapele – genuine South American mahogany would mean an instrument many times the price – and it looks the part with its sunburst top and textured, open-pore finish. The effect is reassuringly no-nonsense and reminiscent of the Depression-era instruments of Gibson and Martin, as well as more modern takes on that theme such as Taylor's American Dream series.

The C-shaped mahogany neck is topped off with an ovangkol fingerboard that lends a certain rosewood-like vibe to proceedings. Ovangkol is also used for the bridge, and the nut and saddle are well-carved pieces of genuine bone. The guitar feels balanced and comfortable on the lap, the slim OM body looking even more so due to the thick ebonised bindings.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £499 (inc padded gigbag)
DESCRIPTION 6-string acoustic guitar, made in China
BUILD Solid mahogany back, sides and top with hand-scalloped X-bracing, mahogany neck, ovangkol fretboard and bridge, genuine bone nut and saddle, 20 frets
HARDWARE Die-cast tuners with black buttons
ELECTRONICS Fishman Sonicore under-saddle pickup with Sonitone preamp
SCALE LENGTH 25.3"/643mm
NECK WIDTH 43mm at nut, 53.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 36mm at nut, 55.7mm at bridge
FINISH Open-pore sunburst
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT cortguitars.com

IN USE

All-mahogany instruments are prized for their fundamental and woody sonic character, and tend to find favour with players in search of intimate, breathy sounds that can also snap and growl when they dig in.

Our first few notes on this guitar are eyebrow-raisingly good, with a great deal of that dusty vintage warmth present in the instrument's timbre. While the bass response is not huge, it can still get the point across,

Throw us a bone: the Core-OC sports a genuine bone nut

Pore patrol: the open-pore sunburst finish has an approachable feel

Dark matter: the ovangkol bridge and 'board have a rosewood-like appearance

and the midrange is musical and detailed. If you're playing fingerstyle without nails, you'll find that a brighter-sounding guitar can often help retain the nuance in the high end, and moving up the neck here, the treble character is present and engaging albeit a little raw.

Dropping the guitar into a series of open tunings serves to confirm our initial impressions of woody happiness, with a growling bass that you can feel in your chest and a snap that's excellent for fingerstyle blues and slide.

The strummed response is also impressive. No-one takes a pick to a mahogany OM expecting D-28 levels of power but the Core-OC can pump out enough volume to support solo vocals unplugged, despite losing some of its sheen when you dig in hard with a heavy pick. If you need more power, the Fishman Sonicore under-saddle pickup, replete with soundhole-mounted volume and tone controls on the Sonitone preamp, will get you there.

This is the sort of product at which Cort truly excels. The company uses its years of mass production experience and undeniably efficient design and manufacturing set-up to produce instruments that can inspire at all levels. We look forward to trying the other wood combinations in the range. G

9/10 **Superb mahogany style-tones for the budget-conscious**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Faith Naked Venus Mahogany **£539**
Guild M-120 Westerly Concert **£545**
Fender PM-3 Triple-O All Mahogany **£519**

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ORIGIN EFFECTS

MAGMA57 & REVIVALTREM

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

What happens when the UK's most intimidatingly high-class pedal maker branches out from compression and overdrive into vibrato and tremolo?

In less than a decade, Origin Effects has established itself as that most comforting of things: a great British luxury brand built on old-school engineering quality and heft. It's surely no accident that its logo looks like something you'd see on the side of a steam train.

In 2020, however, the Buckinghamshire-based company got a little more ambitious. After nailing compression and overdrive, things must have been getting boring, because the next step for Origin was a move into modulation: first with the RevivalTrem, inspired by the brown Fender Deluxe of the early 1960s and its power-valve bias tremolo; then with the Magma57, an unofficial tribute to the Magnatone 200 Series combos of the 1950s and their rich vibrato effects.

However, these are far from mere modulation pedals. In both cases, you're getting a recreation of the entire amp and not just the wobbly stuff. The main bypass footswitch on the right of each pedal engages its overdrive circuit, while the one on the left adds the optional effect on top.

Both units remain reassuringly true to the now-familiar Origin style: they're heavy customers in brushed stainless-steel enclosures with aluminium control knobs and – other than some muted brown and

Vintage tone: the Magma57 takes inspiration from late 1950s Magnatone amps

a dash of gold on the control panel of the Magma57 – no more colour than is absolutely necessary. The amp-style jewel lights are certainly colourful, mind. In both cases, they pulse in time with the modulation when engaged (yellow for the vibe, green for the trem) and revert to a solid red when in drive-only mode.

Let's take a look at those controls, then. Each pedal has a row of three small knobs across the top for adjusting the output level, the tone and the gain of the overdrive circuit. There's also a post-drive tonestack at the bottom, allowing you to switch between three EQ profiles – more treble or bass-heavy, plus a 'power amp' option voiced for DI – and a fine-adjustment knob for the high-frequency response.

In the middle is where you'll find the fruity stuff. For the Magma57, that means vibrato intensity and speed, plus tiny three-way toggle switches for mixing in the dry signal in or out of phase and changing the range of the speed control. The only real difference on the RevivalTrem is that the left-hand switch has just two settings, for two tremolo waveforms.

With both units, you have the option to use an external footswitch (not included) to set a tap tempo or bypass the modulation. We're inclined to think an expression pedal input for riding the tempo would have been more useful but you might disagree.

IN USE

It's ostensibly an Olympic year so gold comes before silver and the Magma57 steps up first. We run it into a completely clean amplifier to give its own amp-mimicking powers a blank slate to work on – and, oh my, what powers they are. There's not a lot of gain on offer here – it's pretty restrained even with the drive control set at three o'clock. But what you do get is a distinctive kind of dirt that's rich and gurgling but tight and snappy at the same time.

The only other pedal we can think of that comes close to this is the fine but severely limited Electro-Harmonix Germanium OD. But there's much more refinement, as well as flexibility, in Origin's overdrive. What's most impressive is how naturally thick the low end feels without ever getting flubby, while the unconventional tone controls bring just enough scope to keep things perfectly focused no matter what kind of pickups you're using.

Sheesh, we're having so much fun we almost forgot to try the vibrato. Here, you get three distinct effects. Broadly speaking, they're something like a Uni-Vibe in the top position, pure pitch vibrato in the middle,

Triple threat: the Magma57 has three-way switches for signal mixing and speed control

Good vibes: Uni-Vibe, pure-pitch and Leslie-style vibrato sounds are all on offer

and an almost Leslie-like effect (with a pronounced bass cut) when the two signals are blended out of phase. It's all good and we would happily pay half the price of the Magma57 for a three-mode vibrato-only pedal that sounds like this.

As we turn to the RevivalTrem, our first impressions are of an overdrive that's relatively unremarkable. But that turns out to be horribly unfair, as once we've cleansed our aural palette by stepping away from the studio for some quiet time and a cuppa, we're much better able to appreciate a sound that's smoother and more saturated than that of the Magma57 – and every bit as likeable. It's about as organically amp-like as drive from a stompbox gets, with a much higher gain range than the other pedal and a controlled fullness to the low end that's closer to modern boutique tones than those of ragged tweeds.

Again, the two EQ sections allow for plenty of tonal shading, whatever guitar and amp you're using, while the tremolo is every bit as warm and throbbing as we were led to expect. The shape switch lets you flip between a sine wave and a 'full wave', the latter bringing a much stronger thump to the peak of each cycle, but in both settings the effect is highly dynamic: hammer those strings hard enough and you'll barely hear it until a chord starts to fade.

Finally, once the neighbours' angry wall-banging begins to get oppressive, we switch off the amp and give both pedals a spin in DI mode. Setting the post-drive EQ switch to the top position, plugging straight into our audio interface and toggling through a couple of speaker cabinet impulse responses in Logic, both do a sterling job. Crucially, they're realistic enough to represent a genuine alternative to recording with a dedicated preamp or relying on software amp simulations.

18+

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Shape up: the RevivalTrem comes loaded with plenty of tremolo-sculpting potential

Neither pedal is perfect – the bypass switching is a little jerky, you can't engage the modulation independently of the drive, and the Magma57 is twice as expensive as its clearest competitor, the Crazy Tube Circuits Killer V – but the fact that both score nine out of 10 tells you all you need to know about how stunning they sound.

KEY FEATURES

Magma57
PRICE £385
DESCRIPTION Vibrato and overdrive pedal, made in the UK
CONTROLS Output level, tone, drive; vibrato intensity and speed with three-way blend and tempo division switches; three-way post-drive EQ switch with treble-adjustment knob; vibrato on/off and bypass footswitches
FEATURES TRS footswitch input; buffered bypass; powered by 9-volt mains supply only
DIMENSIONS 150 x 90 x 64mm
CONTACT origineffects.com

9/10 **Come for the multi-mode vibrato, fall in love with the chunky overdrive**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Crazy Tube Circuits Killer V **€185**
Bigfoot FX Magnavibe **$194**
Big Tone Music Brewery Maggie **$230**

KEY FEATURES

RevivalTrem
PRICE £360
DESCRIPTION Tremolo and overdrive pedal, made in the UK
CONTROLS Output level, tone, drive; tremolo intensity and speed with two-way shape and three-way tempo division switches; three-way post-drive EQ switch with treble-adjustment knob; tremolo on/off and bypass footswitches
FEATURES TRS footswitch input; buffered bypass; powered by 9-volt mains supply only
DIMENSIONS 150 x 90 x 64mm

9/10 **Rich, throbbing tremolo and sweet amp-like drive in one luxurious box**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Catalinbread Valcoder **£159**
Chase Bliss Audio Gravitas **£299**
Hamstead Signature Tremolo **£219**

CORNERSTONE
GLADIO DOUBLE PREAMP

WORDS ED OLESZKO

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Can you capture the tone of an $80,000 amplifier in a £299 stompbox? Cornerstone certainly thinks so

Established in 2014, Cornerstone Music Gear is a family-owned firm for which Italian husband-and-wife team Emilio and Linda Massari design, test and produce each of their pedals by hand to exacting standards. The Gladio, which draws its name from the short double-edged sword wielded by the footsoldiers of ancient Rome, is a dual-overdrive stompbox that is every bit the precision-crafted item you'd expect given Emilio's impressive background in aerospace engineering.

With an existing range that includes the Antique overdrive and Zefiro optical compressor, Emilio sought to squeeze his favourite Dumble amp tones into a pedal. But what defines the Alexander Dumble tone? Stevie Ray Vaughan's dynamic Steel String Singer sound is far removed from the smooth mid-rich crunch of Robben Ford's Overdrive Special and, though we've all heard the records, how many of us have actually played through a real Dumble and know what that feels like?

"Dumble amps were made on order and tweaked to each artist's needs," says Emilio. "This is why Santana, Eric Johnson, Robben Ford and SRV had totally different sounds. For this reason, it doesn't make sense to think in terms of 'Dumble in a box'. The only thing that makes sense is to refer to songs. Therefore, I decided to design the pedal inspired by two specific songs: *Cannonball Shuffle* by Robben Ford for channel one and *Elemental Journey* by Sonny Landreth for channel two."

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £299
DESCRIPTION Dual overdrive pedal, made in Italy
CONTROLS Independent gain, volume and tone controls for each channel, comp switch, jazz/rock switch, single/double mode switch
FEATURES True-bypass switching, powered by 9V power supply only (DC 2.1mm centre negative adaptor)
DIMENSIONS 118 x 94 x 43mm
CONTACT cornerstonegear.it

IN USE

We test the Gladio using a Stratocaster and a Goldtop through the Two-Rock Bloomfield – one of our favourite modern takes on the Dumble sound – and an old tweed Deluxe for contrast. Emilio suggests starting with a clean tone so, running the Strat into the

Fusion core: the jazz/rock switch alters the Gladio's midrange voice

Clip show: channel one boasts silky soft clipping, while channel two is more aggro

No competition: the comp switch delivers lower headroom and smoother tones

Two-Rock set clean, we stomp on side one of the Gladio and are immediately struck by both the audacious weight of the tone and the sheer gain and headroom available.

Lower gain settings give us beautiful, blooming edge-of-break-up tones with a bold and immediate attack. There's smooth soft clipping, huge sustain and dazzling amp-like touch response. Up the gain and you're rewarded with focused, articulate lead tones that roar from the speakers but flip the comp switch if you're seeking lower headroom and a smoother ride.

Switching to the smaller tweed amp, the tones remain impressive and the P-90s in our Goldtop enjoy side two's more aggressive hard clipping. The jazz/rock switch changes the midrange voice, with the rock position excelling at US-voiced slide that verges on fuzz. Switch to double mode and stack both drives to transform a vintage combo into a colossal multi-channel monster, capable of handling almost any genre.

The Gladio doesn't come cheap – well, it does compared to an actual Dumble – but its huge, eloquent tones, precise note attack, effortless sustain and its uncanny Klon-like ability to make every amp and guitar you use it with sound bigger, clearer and better cannot fail to impress. Combine all of that with its seriously impressive build quality and we're well and truly smitten.

9/10 **Expensive lead tones aplenty from a pedal that could be your new secret weapon**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

J Rockett Audio Designs The Dude **£199**
Kingsley Maiden D Preamp **$425**
Van Weelden Royal Overdrive **£549**

BOSS
POCKET GT

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

This smartphone-sized headphone guitar amp and multi-effects unit could be the perfect accessory for learners – or anyone with unappreciative housemates

It's part of the Boss GT range and it fits in your pocket, so it didn't take a visionary genius to come up with the idea of calling it the Boss Pocket GT. Nevertheless, this titchy guitar gadget is smarter than its dimensions suggest.

Bluetooth connectivity gives the Pocket GT two special abilities: firstly, to load and edit virtually unlimited effects and amp sounds from the Boss Tone Studio app, just like its full-size siblings; and secondly, to stream videos wirelessly from a smartphone or tablet so that you can play along.

Remote video controls take up a large chunk of the unit's front panel (and there's even a YouTube logo on the box) but this isn't purely a strum-along tool for noobs. In fact, you don't even need a separate device to make use of its key features: plug in a guitar at one end and some headphones at the other, and you can spend the evening scrolling through the 99 onboard presets like a kid in a sonic sweetshop.

Navigation comes via a basic LED display and a 'value' wheel for browsing the presets. Once you've found one you like, use the three dials below for limited control over six elements of the sound: amp gain, amp level, reverb, overdrive/distortion, modulation, and delay. To unlock more parameters, hit the Bluetooth button and spark up the Boss Tone Studio app.

There's a rudimentary tuner onboard, and the battery should last for about four hours of use before requiring a recharge via the included micro-USB cable.

Pocket rocket: this smartphone-sized unit facilitates home practise at top speed

Cancel culture: the centre cancel switch cuts out the streaming source's midrange frequencies

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £219
DESCRIPTION Headphone multi-effects and amp modeller, made in China
CONTROLS Preset scrolling wheel, single-parameter controls for amp gain, amp level, reverb, overdrive/distortion, modulation, and delay; Bluetooth pairing button, tuner button, video play/pause and skip buttons for paired device; power switch, master volume, centre cancel switch
FEATURES Two-character LED display, Bluetooth and aux mini-jack inputs, micro-USB charging; free Boss Tone Studio app (iOS and Android) for loading and editing presets
DIMENSIONS 129 x 71 x 28mm
CONTACT boss.info

IN USE

There's not much to say about the Pocket GT as a standalone device for practising in silence. Trying out and tweaking sounds is an idle pleasure and the quality of those sounds is no different to what you'd get from any other Boss GT or Katana source: that is, leaning towards stadium rock but hugely varied and generally pretty good.

Where things get a little fiddly is in the realm of Bluetooth. There are two separate connections involved – audio for streaming and MIDI for the app – and you have to make sure that the latter is disconnected before trying to pair up the former, which can be a faff.

Once you're in though, it's no trouble to balance the levels of guitar and video, and there's even a semi-effective centre cancel switch that removes selected midrange frequencies from the streaming source in order to create additional space for your playing.

Unfortunately, we couldn't get the forward/backward skip buttons to work with either iOS or Android. But that left us wondering why they're there anyway: if you're playing along with a video, why not just make use of the controls on the screen you're sitting in front of?

This part of the Pocket GT has a whiff of gimmickry about it, hardly helped by the plasticky and not especially robust feel of the unit itself. But none of that should detract from the simple brilliance of this device's core functions – and it fits in your pocket!

8/10 **The easiest solution yet for home practise with high-quality tones galore**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

IK Multimedia iRig Micro Amp **€183**
Blackstar Super Fly **£199**
Boss Waza-Air **£378**

Ramon Arreola Jr (left) and Nick Greer (centre) showing off the Flyweight Shirley at the NAMM Show

INDUSTRY INSIDER

BA FERGUSON GUITARS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Ramon 'Boot' Arreola Jr, the man behind BA Ferguson Guitars, reveals how friends in the guitar community helped him shape a boutique brand with a reputation for hand-crafted quality

How did you get into guitar?

"In the early to mid-1990s, I got into Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Guns N' Roses. I was hooked on all the guitar stuff I heard, especially when it came to the noisy nature of Kurt Cobain's guitar work. Naturally, I bugged my mom for a guitar and eventually she got some money together to get me my first. It wasn't great but it was what they could afford and I loved it. I'd stick pieces of wire bread ties on each string to simulate distortion. It drove my mother nuts. A year later, I learnt some actual chords from some friends at a church group. That's when all the real 'trouble' began!"

When did you start building or tinkering with guitars?

"My frustrated mother, who was under the stress of switching jobs one day, broke that same guitar into a million pieces when she found me still practicing for hours after giving me a list of chores to have done. Though I vowed 'revenge' by way of trying to glue every piece back together, several friends wound up donating unused guitars to me. Before I received those, I borrowed a guitar from a friend and accidentally broke it. I ended up fixing that one with the help of my grandfather, a seasoned woodworker. Eventually, when my other guitars were in need of repairs, I wasn't afraid to fix them. After graduating high school, I landed an apprenticeship with Barry Martin, who owns Frets & Necks, a shop in El Paso. I met him years prior and begged to work for free for him. He politely refused and told me to focus on getting something that paid better. He became a mentor to me. I've been messing with instruments ever since."

When did you realise you had a viable business?

"While fixing guitars, I'd always circle around to construction methods and how I wanted to do things differently. During those conversations, I came up with the idea of using the name Ferguson. I had always struggled with people pronouncing my name and, sadly, being a first-generation Mexican American, I had always felt a bit of shame about my name, thinking no-one would take 'Arreola Guitars' seriously. I'd use a pseudonym when I did photography or when I recorded bands – often Boot Ferguson or J Ferguson. Eventually, I came to terms with my name and added the BA for Boot Arreola. After moving to South Carolina in 2004, I began trying to acquire guitar repair work to get experience. That eventually led to me opening up for business around 2006. By 2008, I had started building guitars. Each time I made a guitar, I knew that the next one could be better if I kept trying and learning. It wasn't until 2011 that I felt confident enough to make a batch of guitars for Summer NAMM."

Did you have any external investment starting out?

"The investments came in non-monetary ways. When I left my apprenticeship, Barry gave me some tools that he'd collected over 30 years to take with me. When we lived in Florence, SC, my father-in-law let me build out his garage space as a shop until we moved. There, I met Steve Avant, who allowed me to borrow some vacant space he owned downtown to get on my feet.

Acoustic guitars and mandolins were Arreola Jr's first love

The new Deluxe Thinline Ranger in mid-production

The Shirley is the company's most sought-after design

There were countless acts of kindness from him and others along the way that helped me stay encouraged and in business. We did a successful Kickstarter at one point to introduce the Standard offering of guitars. The hardest thing I've probably had to do was to leave all of that behind to move back to El Paso, Texas. Today, I share a shop space with another instrument maker and I build about 45 guitars a year."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?

"Probably in 2011 when I failed miserably at Summer NAMM. We showed up to the show with about 12 guitars. They were all very different – mostly my interpretations of a Tele or Strat, along with the first two Shirley prototypes that wound up being my flagship guitar. We left that show in debt and downtrodden. It took that experience for me to realise that the style was just all over the place. So I got rid of every model except the Shirley, Walker and two acoustic models. It seemed to work because people started asking for the Shirley by name. To this day, it's my favourite design to build and is easily associated with BA Ferguson."

How did you come up with the Shirley?

"When I did my apprenticeship, I'd sketch in a notebook and there was one I'd draw out over and over again that was my dream guitar. It always had elements of the Ibanez Talman, Tele and Iceman guitars but I could never get that drawing right. Years later, I had drawn it out to finally decide what my dream guitar looked like, then I shelved it and forgot about it. It wasn't until a friend placed a custom order and described my dream guitar that I grabbed the drawing and he said, 'This is it'."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

"The people I've met and how many customers have become my friends. The Walker is named after my friend Ben Walker, who owns the first of its kind. The Standard line exists because of Philippe Herndon of Caroline Guitar Company, who guided me through a successful Kickstarter campaign. Nick Greer and I struck up a friendship that has led to tons of calls about life and guitar engineering, and that led to the development of the Flyweight, which has been successful. I'm proud of the artists who have sought me out to make them guitars, like Fred Zeller, who does sound production for *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*. The fact that I get to focus on building and creating guitars in my old stomping ground brings a huge sense of encouragement."

What's next for BA Ferguson guitars?

"While I mostly make electric guitars, my first loves were mandolins and acoustics. This year will see a new standard offering of acoustics and mandolins. Up until recently, those instruments were only available via custom order, which generally starts at about the $3,000 range. There's also a new electric guitar fuelled and inspired by conversations with Nick Greer. It's called the Ranger." G

For more information, visit baferguson.com

K-Line
K-Line guitars
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI U.S.A.

SHOP TALK

CHRIS KROENLEIN
K-LINE GUITARS

WORDS DAVE HUNTER
WORKSHOP PHOTOS JACOB KROENLEIN

Ask any player what they feel is missing from the market and they're unlikely to plead that the world needs more bolt-on solidbodies. Yet along comes K-Line, a maker that does it all so right, and suddenly there's more than enough room for a small company that knows how to deliver where it counts

It's perpetually fascinating how many guitar, amp and pedal makers have become successful with no formal training in their craft. Sure, a proper education in any pursuit usually pays off but it's also worth noting that passion, curiosity and an apparently innate knack for figuring out how things work can yield surprisingly effective results.

That's how it was with Leo Fender, a hobby-level tinkerer in electronics with a two-year junior college diploma in book-keeping who went on to found the world's most famous guitar and amplifier company. And so it is with Chris Kroenlein, who established K-Line Guitars on the back of no formal training in luthiery but with an inherited mechanical nous and a passion for digging into what makes these obsession-inspiring instruments tick.

I first encountered K-Line guitars in the mid-2010s when a friend put into my hands a Strat-like Springfield model that Kroenlein had built for him. It played beautifully. It was made from light and extremely resonant woods, wore an immaculate nitro finish and flawlessly dressed frets, and sounded outstanding plugged in – and was acquired two or three years earlier, I was told, at about half the entry price of a new Fender Custom Shop guitar with similar appointments.

Word of K-Line's quality and value has spread throughout the guitar world these past five years or so and Kroenlein's own reputation as a maker has been justifiably elevated. Unsurprisingly, his prices have gone up too. But his guitars still represent stunning value for hand-made electrics that are created start to finish by one man in a small shop in St Louis, Missouri. All signs point to Kroenlein rising to the next level in this arena too – up there with Grosh, Lentz, Tom Anderson and the like – although many current owners of his recent creations will tell you he's already there, and that's hard to argue with.

WOOD CUTTING

"Growing up as a kid in Saint Louis," says Kroenlein, "I began playing guitar when I was about 10 years old. My pop had an autobody and mechanic shop right next door to our house. I loved to play but was a curious kid and always loved to find out how things worked, so I spent more time breaking down guitars than playing them. I had no formal training. I did it the hard way, by trial and error. My dad taught me about mechanics and painting, as I was a barfly in the shop as a kid. I worked for him through high school and during breaks in college so I suppose some things came more natural to me."

Like many in the tear-it-down-to-see-how-it-ticks camp, Kroenlein eventually began putting the things together for himself from the raw parts. Upon heading to college in the early 1990s (where he earned a BA in economics), this proved a better means of acquiring satisfactory guitars for his own playing than any off-the-shelf options he could actually afford.

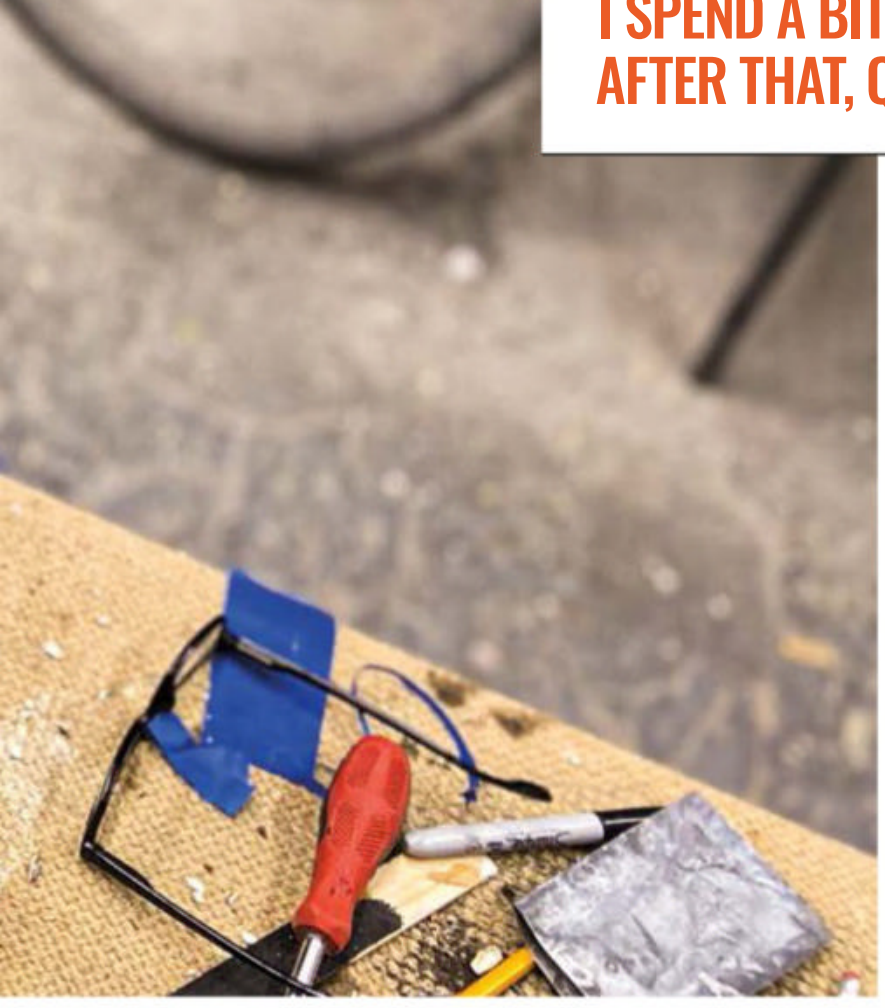
"I would buy necks and bodies and experiment with different combos until I found what worked best together," he recalls. "Other guitarists around always commented on my guitars and how they played, so they asked me if I could do the same for them.

Fast forward again to 1996 and starting a career out of school with some money in my pocket, I would buy bodies and necks and build partscasters. Initially, I used third-party cutters for the wood and began building K-Line parts guitars."

As he fed this demand from local players, Kroenlein made his part-time hobby business official with the founding of the K-Line Guitars company. A few years into that, he pushed his skillset further, hewing the foundations of his guitars from the tree up.

"By 2009, I was without a day job and hungry to make it a go," says Kroenlein, "so I invested in CNC.

"I HAND-SELECT MY WOOD BASED ON MOISTURE CONTENT AND I SPEND A BIT EXTRA TO GET THE DRIEST WOOD POSSIBLE. AFTER THAT, QUALITY HARDWARE MATTERS A LOT"



Every K-Line guitar is hand-built by company founder Chris Kroenlein in his Missouri workshop

With the help of others, I began making bodies first and then necks. By 2011, we were 95 per cent in-house made. I was always a student, picking up knowledge from wherever and whomever I could."

A BETTER SET OF TYRES

That many of the K-Line guitars fall into that archetypal F-inspired bolt-neck category, their maker explains to us, comes largely down to one thing. "Honestly, Eric Clapton," says Kroenlein. "I was a fan, and my first guitar was a Blackie Strat. I love single-coils."

For a budding guitar maker, at that time, the accessible format also made for a somewhat easier ramping-up into production.

"Parts were easier to get," says Kroenlein. "And when big companies decided not to listen to the players, it opened the door for many of us to… not reinvent the wheel but to put a better set of tyres on it. I stayed away from the set necks until much later, when in 2015 I did a run of Specials and Juniors. I realised quickly that the [profit margin] was much less and the competition was greater. 'G' guys are not as accepting of different headstock designs either, so I discontinued those in 2018."

Having evolved several years ago from purely assembling partscasters to manufacturing most of his foundational components in-house, Kroenlein says he has also learnt a lot of things that have helped elevate him out of the assembler category and into the realm of true guitar builders. Prime among them is wood selection. Asked the difference between a good and a great guitar, he replies without hesitation.

"Wood. Specifically, dry, resonant wood. I hand-select my wood based on moisture content and I spend a bit extra to get the driest wood possible. After that, quality hardware matters a lot. More specifically, hardware that performs as needed but also provides the sound needed. It's not about price, as I've found. Oftentimes, the lesser quality of steel in certain parts produces the desired outcome in tone.

"Today's world is full of forums and information where many people are armchair pros of all things guitar. Some of these people equate, say, a bridge

ABOVE K-Line guitars come with near-limitless options, as evidenced by this array of Texola and Del Mar models

FACING PAGE The unique small-offset style of K-Line's Del Mar lends itself as well to hardtail versions as it does to vibrato variations

that costs $200 with the best bridge out there. A great example is a very popular brand's bridges for S-style guitars: great workmanship, they look great but they can make my guitars too bright and harsh."

NEVER SETTLE FOR JUST 'OKAY'

Materials aside, Kroenlein displays a lot of thought for the little hand-applied details that can often help take guitars from 'maybe' to 'yes'. As players, we all know them when we feel them but they are all too often missing from guitars that are otherwise of quite good quality and for which we might have paid a tidy sum were these quietly important factors present.

"I think it's important to pay attention to the fit and finish and the little things," says Kroenlein, "like a nice hand-rolled fretboard edge, saddle screws not sticking out of the saddle too much, proper neck-pocket angles to ease set-up and feel. My general principle is: never settle for just 'okay'. Always strive for only the best quality you can deliver. As a small company, you must make sure that nothing leaves the shop unless it meets standards set forth. I make them like I like them."

An important part of that principle involves Kroenlein's attitude both before and after he makes the sale. It's what we generally refer to simply as 'customer service'.

"I am asking people to send me, quite frankly, a lot of money. I like to make myself available to chat with them to ensure that we are on the same page the entire way through the process. I'm not a fan of lots of emails when a nice 30-minute phone conversation can take care of any questions."

Part of this quest for the best led Kroenlein, after several years of selecting his pickups from among the popular high-end makers on the market, to learn how to wind his own. The upside of the effort was twofold: there's now another major K-Line component that's made entirely in-house and the practice eliminates a significant part of the sonic stew that was dependent on the work of others.

"I actually started making pickups about eight or nine years ago, developing the process when I had the time," he says. "I tried many different wind patterns and materials, both traditional and non-traditional, trying to gain the 'it' factor. Let me say that I was not disappointed in the options already available but I was unable to truly have control beyond off-the-shelf pickups. Having the ability to go back on the winder and alter a pickup to get the exact sound is priceless. Another aspect is pride. I launched the pickup line at NAMM 2018 after a long journey of trial and error. The hard part is not chasing tone down a rabbit hole.

Find your materials, find your wind technique and repeat. Consistency is always the key. And finally, money. We as small builders make a very humble living off of guitars. Any little amount of cost that can be saved by doing the work yourself helps the bottom line. When you can be truly proud to call them your own and save some cash, I call that winning."

START TO FINISH

Coming at the venture as a self-taught luthier, Kroenlein obviously had to develop certain skills that weren't entirely empirical and that didn't flow naturally from his experience working after school in his dad's car-repair business. Those finer and more finicky skills, such as fret and nut work, for example, required some practise.

"I am a bit different, as I did not start out as a repair guy or go to any specific schooling except the school of hard knocks. Without any formal training," he says, "I had to perfect the craft through trial and error and lots of reading."

Quality finish work, on the other hand, came quite naturally to Kroenlein, thanks to his years using similar spray techniques in the body shop. Read user reviews of K-Line guitars and, among other plaudits, you will discover a slew of glowing comments about the quality of Kroenlein's nitrocellulose finishes. Noting this and making an observation that he seems to be doing more aged and play-worn finishes lately, he duly corrects. "Actually, the business started as all-relic. Then there was a huge demand for the quality finish so I offered up the new finishes as well.

"The relic trend ebbs and flows. Right now, it's hot again for some reason. I'm one of the few companies that offers both, as well as an in-between option. Sort of like putting a new guitar under a bed for 50 years and never playing it. A bit of patina but in perfect shape. Trial and error is ongoing. Every day it seems that I wonder about a new way to do something, like my recent addition of the French polish neck-back for relics. I have seen so many real vintage guitars and have endless pictures to use to emulate natural wear but, if you go all-natural, they are not always desired so you have to embellish a little."

One builder after another has commented that, on the whole, guitarists tend to be a rather conservative group, hence their propensity to stick with the tried-and-tested shapes. Put simply, familiar sells. Playing by those rules has benefitted K-Line's efforts in the marketplace too, the brand's S-type Springfield and the T-style Truxton easily proving its best sellers, with J-style offset-waist San Bernardino, offset-meets-Tele Texola and Jazz Bass-inspired Bass following behind.

There is another in the line-up, however, that is closer to Kroenlein's heart and that ticks the right boxes for a creative new design and yet still presents enough familiarity to make it easy to pick up even for traditionalist players: the Del Mar.

"THE RELIC TREND EBBS AND FLOWS. RIGHT NOW, IT'S HOT AGAIN FOR SOME REASON. I'M ONE OF THE FEW COMPANIES THAT OFFERS BOTH, AS WELL AS AN IN-BETWEEN OPTION"

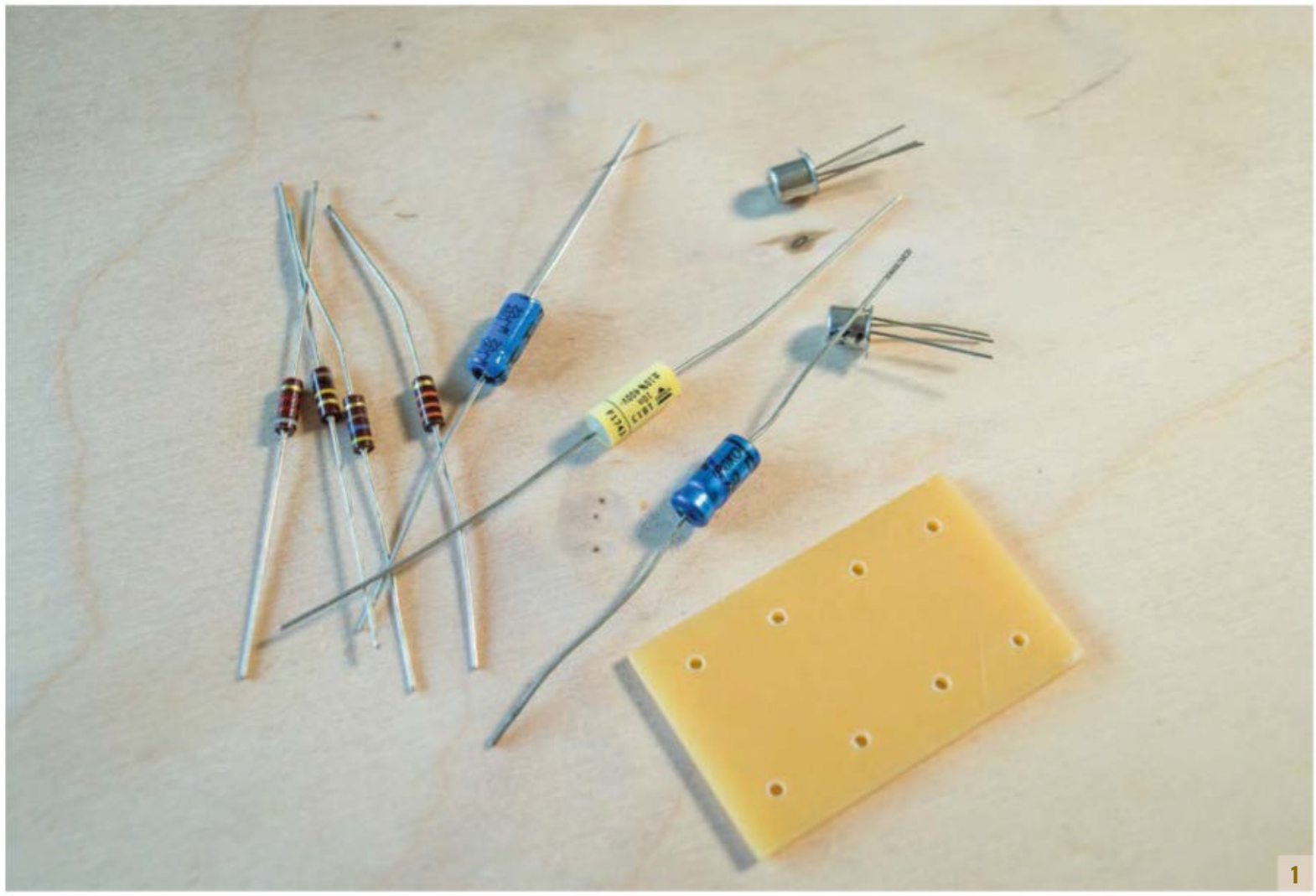
"I always wanted to do a smaller offset guitar that would also be an adaptable platform," says Kroenlein. "I can make hardtail or trem versions. I can use just about any sort of pickup combination. It is a fun guitar. I play one with Strat pickups in it and love the looks I get. Different is fun!"

Ultimately, though, Kroenlein's mission is to serve the client and the attitude is serving K-Line well as its name ascends the ranks of quality US-made electrics.

"There are a lot of options in the world of guitars," he concludes. "I would love for everyone to buy a K-Line but I know that is not real life. Whatever you do, support the small builders. The money they make goes directly to pay soccer fees and for band lessons for their kids or braces or a nice night out with the family, so thanks to all for the support!"

For more information, visit k-lineguitars.com

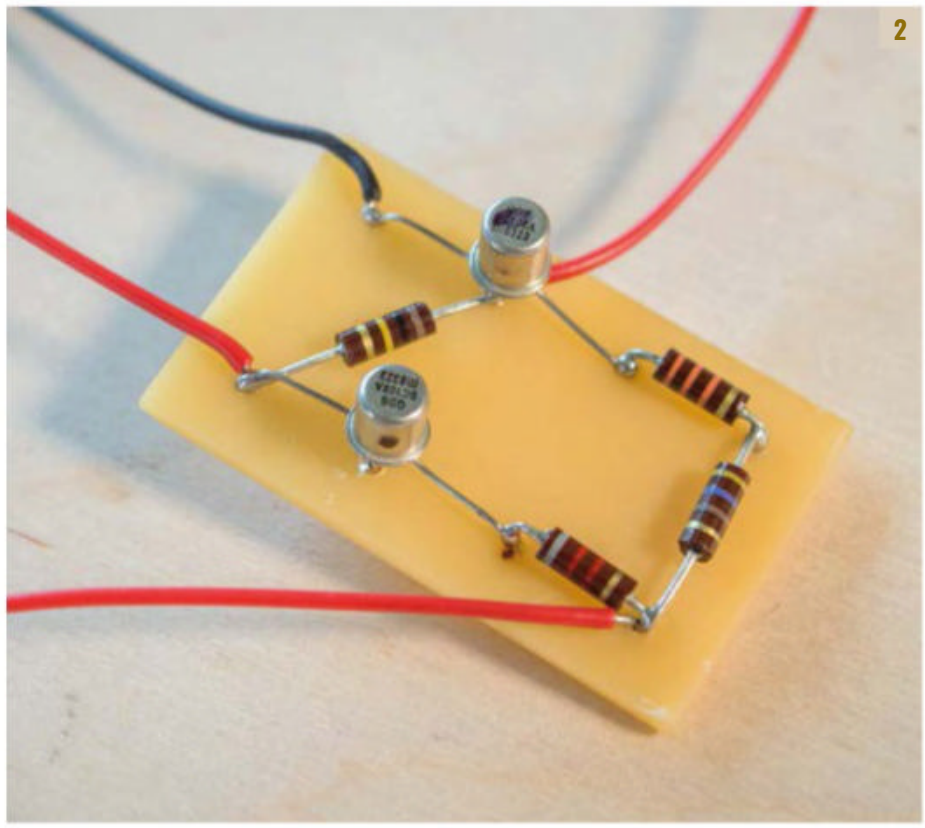
GE
SI
FUZZ
LEVEL

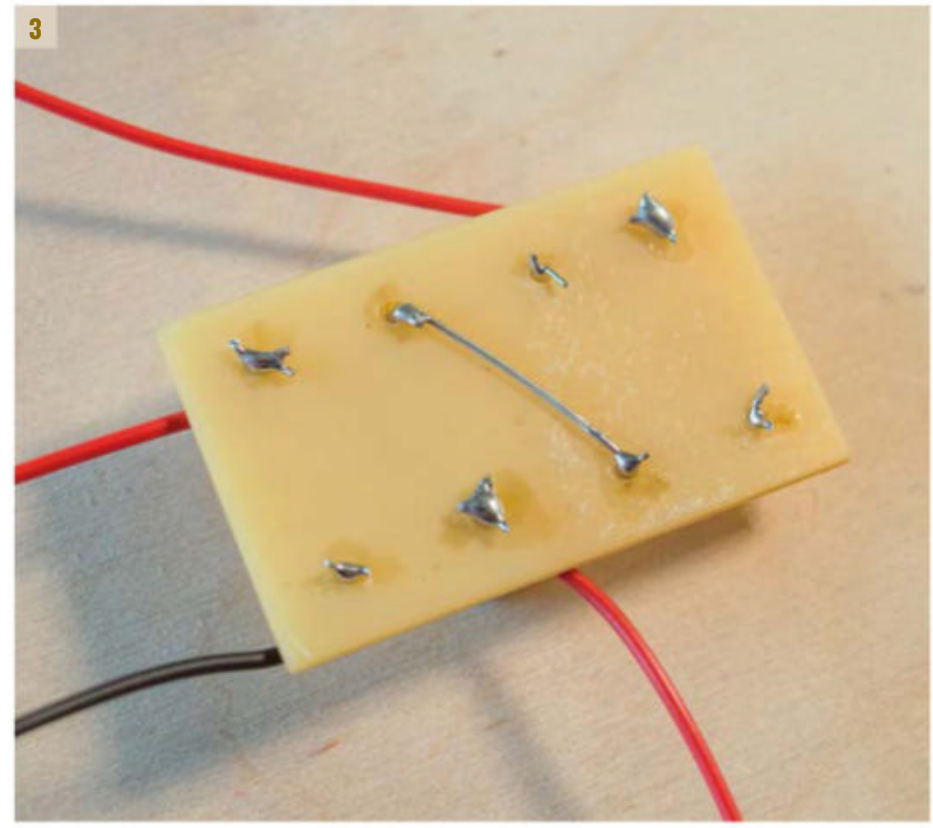


1 The original Fuzz Face circuit requires just a handful of components and a small circuit board

2 The component legs are pushed through pre-drilled holes and soldered together on the reverse of the board

3 It's not the prettiest soldering job but the joints are secure and the link wire isn't forgotten





DIY WORKSHOP

BUILD YOUR OWN FUZZ PEDAL

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Here's how to build a basic Fuzz Face clone from scratch and turn it into a 'boutique' unit with precision biasing, transistor switching and more

There are plenty of ready-to-go pedal kits out there but something as simple as a vintage-style fuzzbox can be built from scratch. Doing so will help you learn more about the circuitry, as well as make modifications to optimise its tone and versatility along the way. Fuzz Face lore is awash with snake oil and there are terrible, mediocre and even some quasi-mythic gold-standard examples out there.

Thankfully, knowledgeable replica builders have had decades to analyse this relatively simple circuit and develop a clear understanding of the variables that distinguish the best from the rest. Many have kindly shared their findings, demystifying the Fuzz Face in the process.

Here, I will demonstrate how to build a basic Fuzz Face from scratch and explore how to make the circuit sound exactly as you want it to. I'll also be building a more advanced version with switchable transistors and some other boutique tweaks.

POSITIVE ELEMENTS

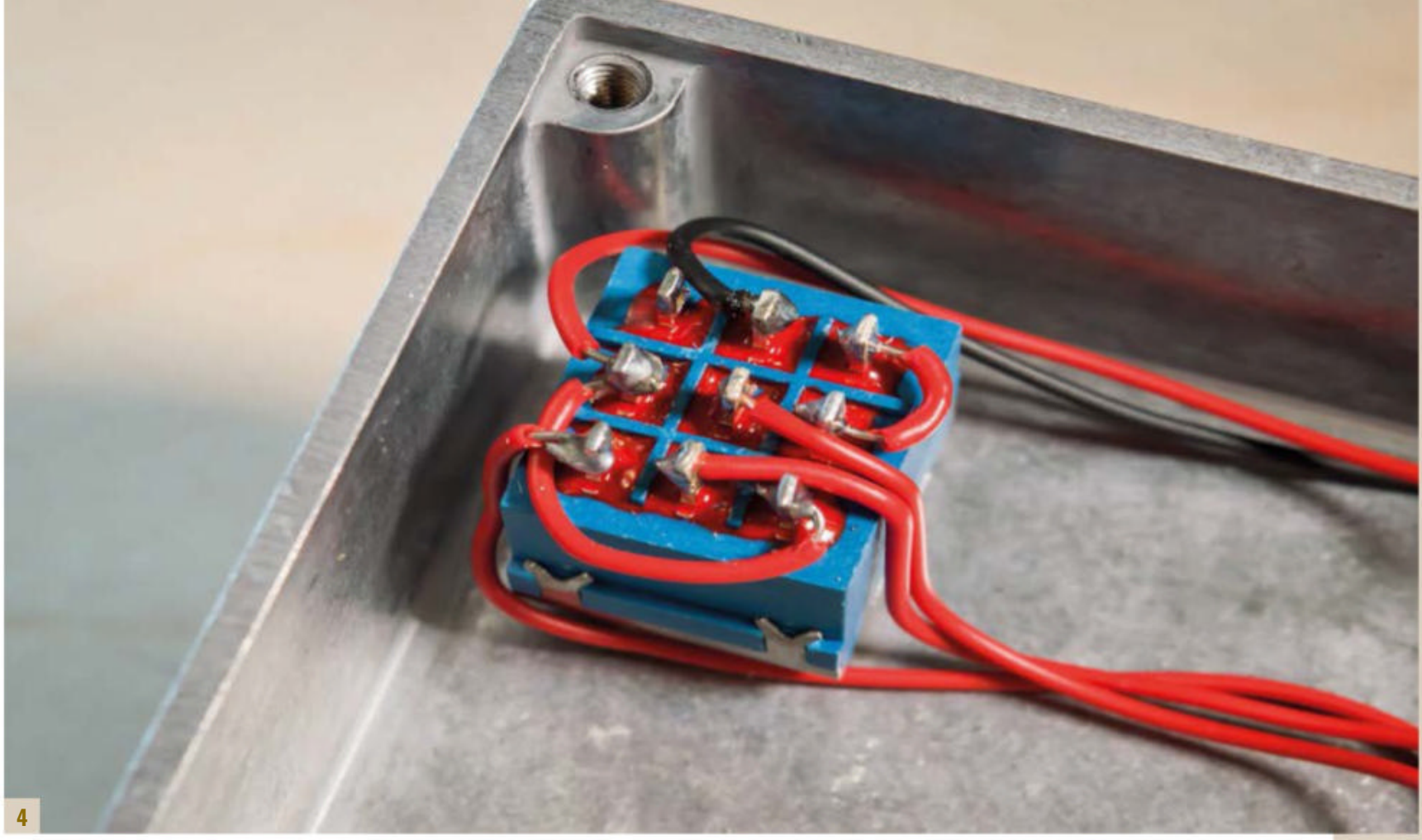
Before we begin our ground-up build, let's get the important stuff out of the way and distinguish between the two Fuzz Face eras.

4 Wiring the switch connections is fiddly and best done before you begin your pedal assembly

5 The 470K level control is grounded via the potentiometer casing and you can substitute a 100K for extra brightness

6 A 22uF capacitor is soldered across two of the fuzz control's lugs and grounded on one side

7 The basic fuzz is finished and will fit into a smaller enclosure if you prefer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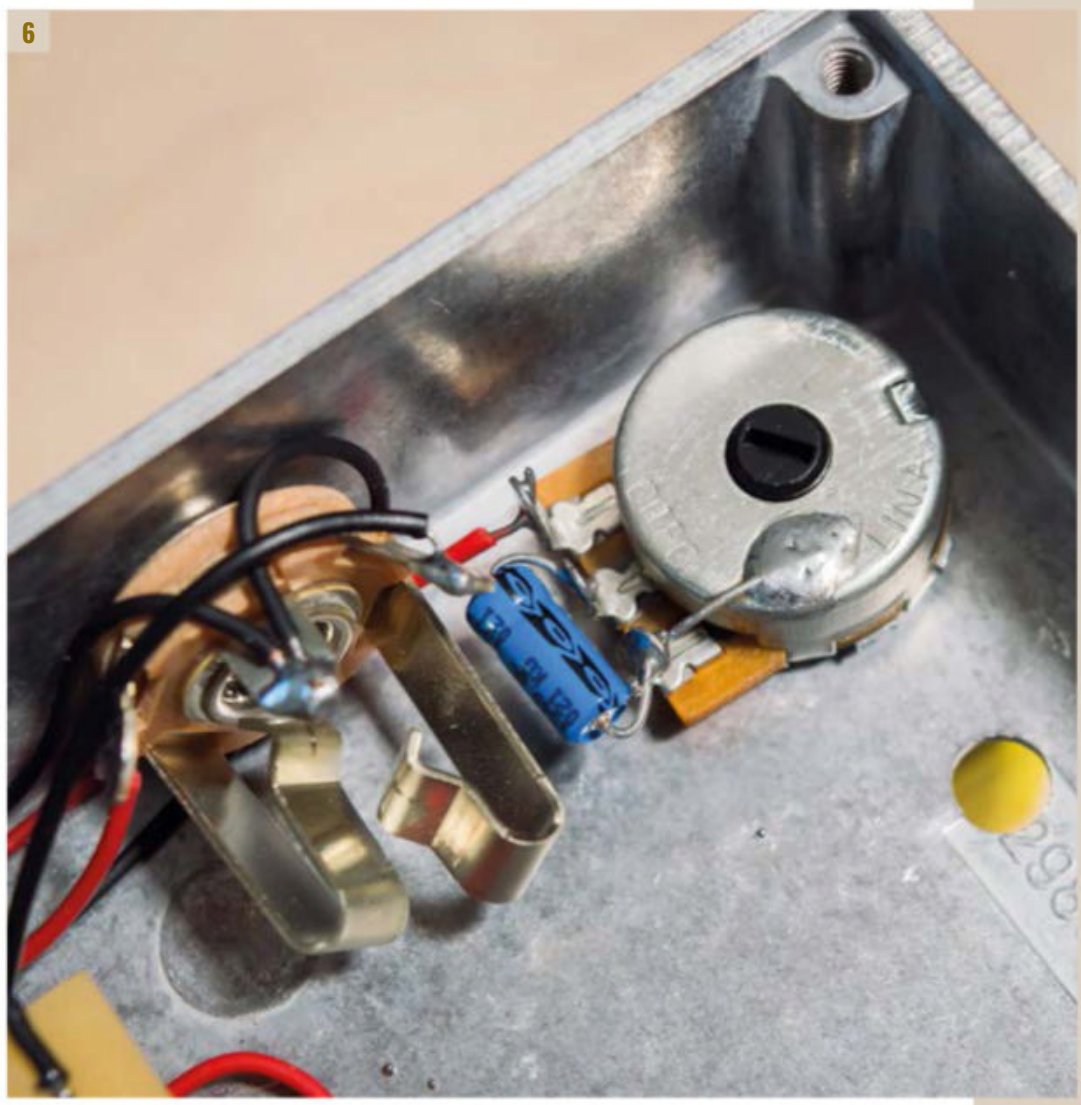
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Arbiter Electronics began manufacturing Fuzz Faces in 1966 using NKT275 PNP germanium transistors. Capable of sounding wonderful but notoriously inconsistent, the NKT275's performance varies depending on ambient temperature. Arbiter merged with Dallas Electronics in about 1968 and, by the end of that year, Fuzz Faces were being made with NPN silicon transistors instead.

PNP stands for positive/negative/positive and NPN for negative/positive/negative. But they both sport a sandwich-style construction. The middle (base) layer of PNP transistors is negative, while the outer layers (the emitter and collector) are positive. In NPN transistors, the polarity is reversed, with the base being positive and the emitter and the collector both negative.

Sonic differences between germanium and silicon aside, this polarity is important. PNP Fuzz Face circuits are not compatible with most modern pedalboard power supplies because the positive is grounded, rather than the now-conventional negative. PSUs with electronically isolated outputs may work but are not an ideal solution and force many vintage and vintage-style Fuzz Face owners to resign themselves to battery power.

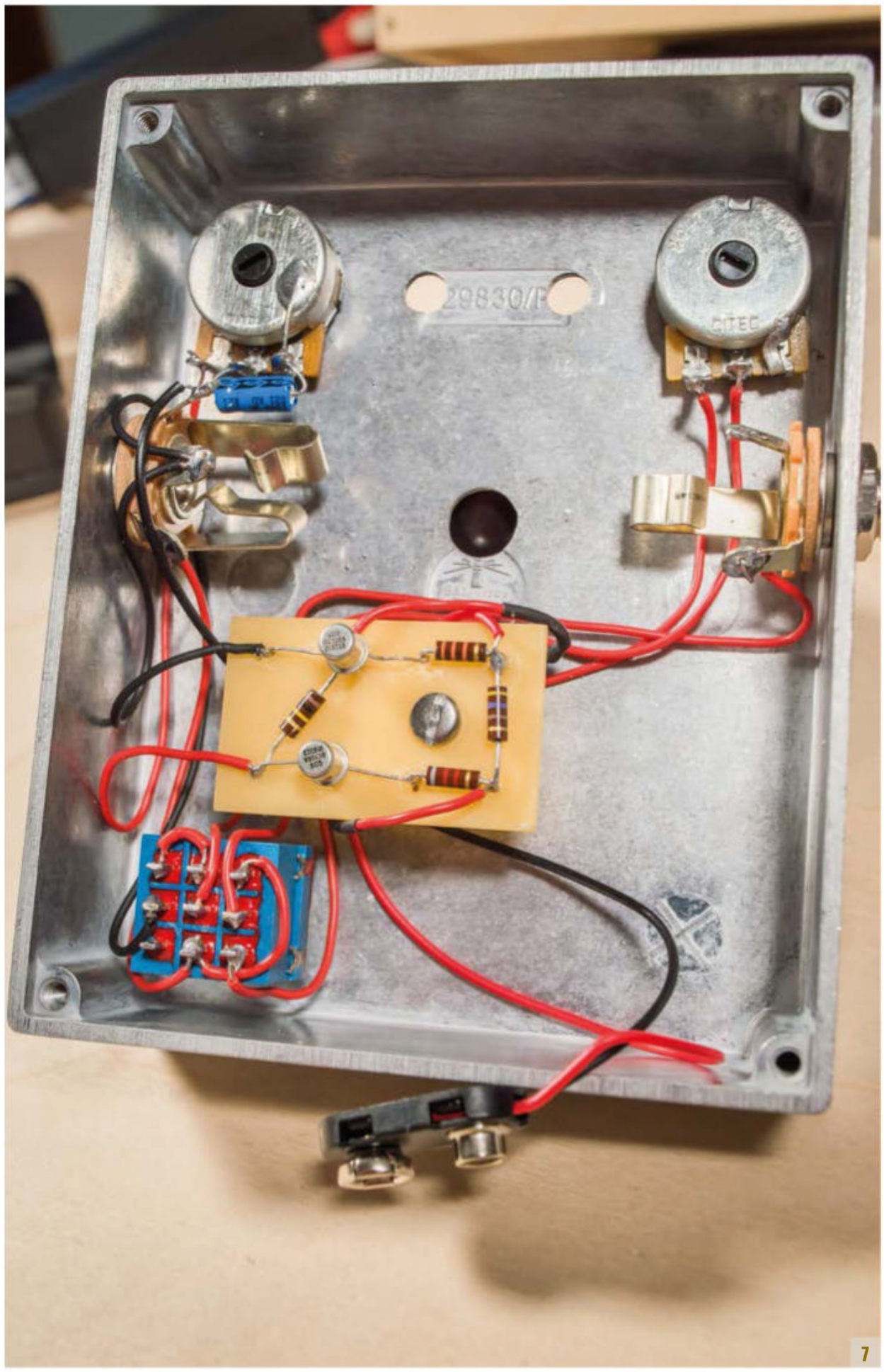
Here, to keep things straightforward, I'm beginning with an NPN silicon transistor Fuzz Face that can be powered using a standard supply.

TRANSISTOR TIPS

Think the cost of old-stock tubes borders on insane? Try researching vintage transistors. The kind of holy-grail transistors used in classic treble boost, wah and fuzz pedals are especially expensive. My advice is not to get too drawn into all that and be wary of buying expensive NOS transistors without guarantees from the seller that they aren't leaky and have adequate gain.

The NPN silicon resistors used in Fuzz Faces include BC108C, BC109B, BC109C, BC183L and BC209C. You can find these online from components suppliers such as rapidonline.com and cricklewoodelectronics.com. In fact, you can probably get all the parts for this project from either of these outlets.

For a thorough analysis of the germanium and silicon Fuzz Face circuits, visit geofex.com/article_folders/fuzzface/fffram.htm,



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BASIC FUZZ PARTS LIST

- 33K resistor
- 100K resistor
- 8K2 resistor
- 470R resistor
- 2.2uF capacitor
- 22uF capacitor
- 0.01uF capacitor
- 500K pot
- 1k pot
- 2x NPN silicon transistors
- Stereo jack socket
- Mono jack socket
- 3PDT footswitch
- Metal enclosure
- Non-conductive circuit board

where you'll also find down-to-earth advice on transistors and a very simple circuit with which you can test transistors for gain and leakage. As part of this project, I adapt the circuit to test my transistors and find that some are leaky. This isn't uncommon but you of course shouldn't use the leaky ones. Fortunately, I find a few that don't leak and I write the gain rating of each on the side of the casing.

DRAWING BOARDS

It's easy to find printed circuit boards for PNP and NPN Fuzz Face circuits but you don't necessarily need one. This is such a simple build that it's easy to assemble on tag strip. You could even make your own eyelet or turret board instead.

I begin by drawing a circuit layout that only requires a small board and eight drilled holes. You can use fibreboard or glass epoxy board – the stuff with copper on one side is fine but you'll have to first remove the copper layer by soaking the board in PCB etchant solution. If you're a fan of DIY relic'ing, you may already have etchant solution (ferric chloride), as it's often used to artificially age nickel-plated guitar parts.

After cutting the board, marking out the hole locations and drilling them with a 2mm drill bit, the components are carefully mounted and the leadout wires folded back to secure them in position for soldering. I make all the solder joints at the rear of the board, then snip off the excess wire. This is certainly not the most elegant way to build. But because the circuit is effectively wired point to point, it's very easy to do.

Ensure you have the transistor wires connected the right way. The base wire will always be in the centre and the emitter wire may be marked by a little tag on the case. Refer to the wiring diagrams provided and look up your chosen transistors online to confirm the connections.

I drill spaces for control pots, jack sockets and an on/off switch in my metal enclosure. I use a 15mm nylon stand-off and two screws to mount the board onto the enclosure. The input capacitor is connected between the board and the input jack, and the output capacitor connects the board output to the volume control.

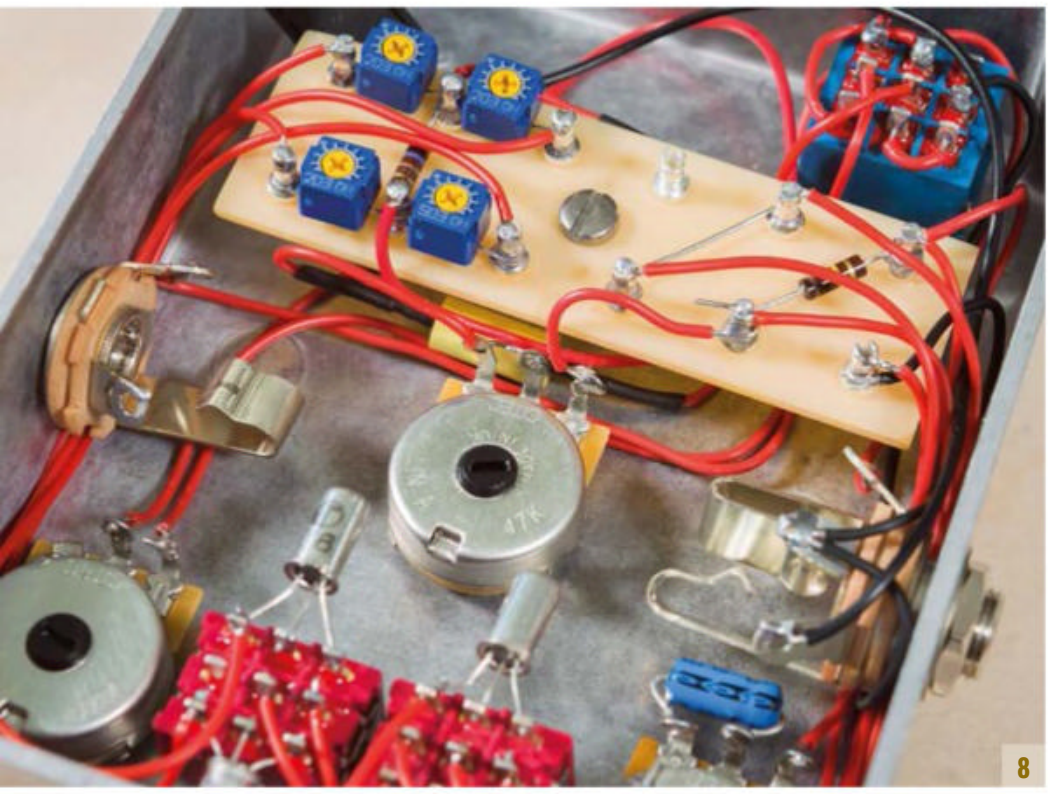
There's a 20uF capacitor, which I solder across the wiper and ground connections of the fuzz control. All the switch connections are made and a battery clip is installed with the positive soldered to the junction of the 33K and 470R resistors and the negative to the ring tag of the input jack.

If you follow the diagram carefully and make strong solder joints, your fuzzbox should work first time. Congratulations on a job well done. But does it sound good? If it does, you've been lucky and your work here is done. If it doesn't? It's almost certainly bad luck rather than bad building.

Mine sounds distinctly average. There's not much sustain and notes eventually cut out rather than fade evenly, so it's just like many vintage Fuzz Faces and some of the boutique clones. It should sound better and I'm going to do something about it.

UNBIASED OPINION

Accepting that some Fuzz Faces somehow sound magical while others are mediocre is fuzzy logic. No decent amp-builder will simply throw in a pair of power tubes and hope for the best. Instead they'll check their voltages and measure their bias settings.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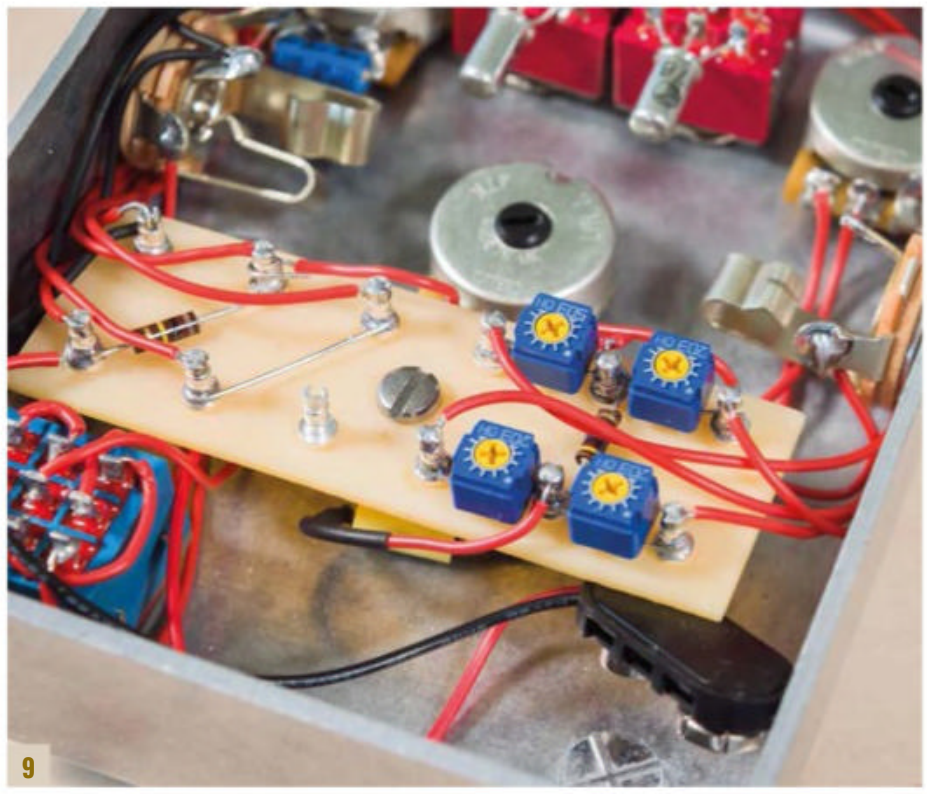
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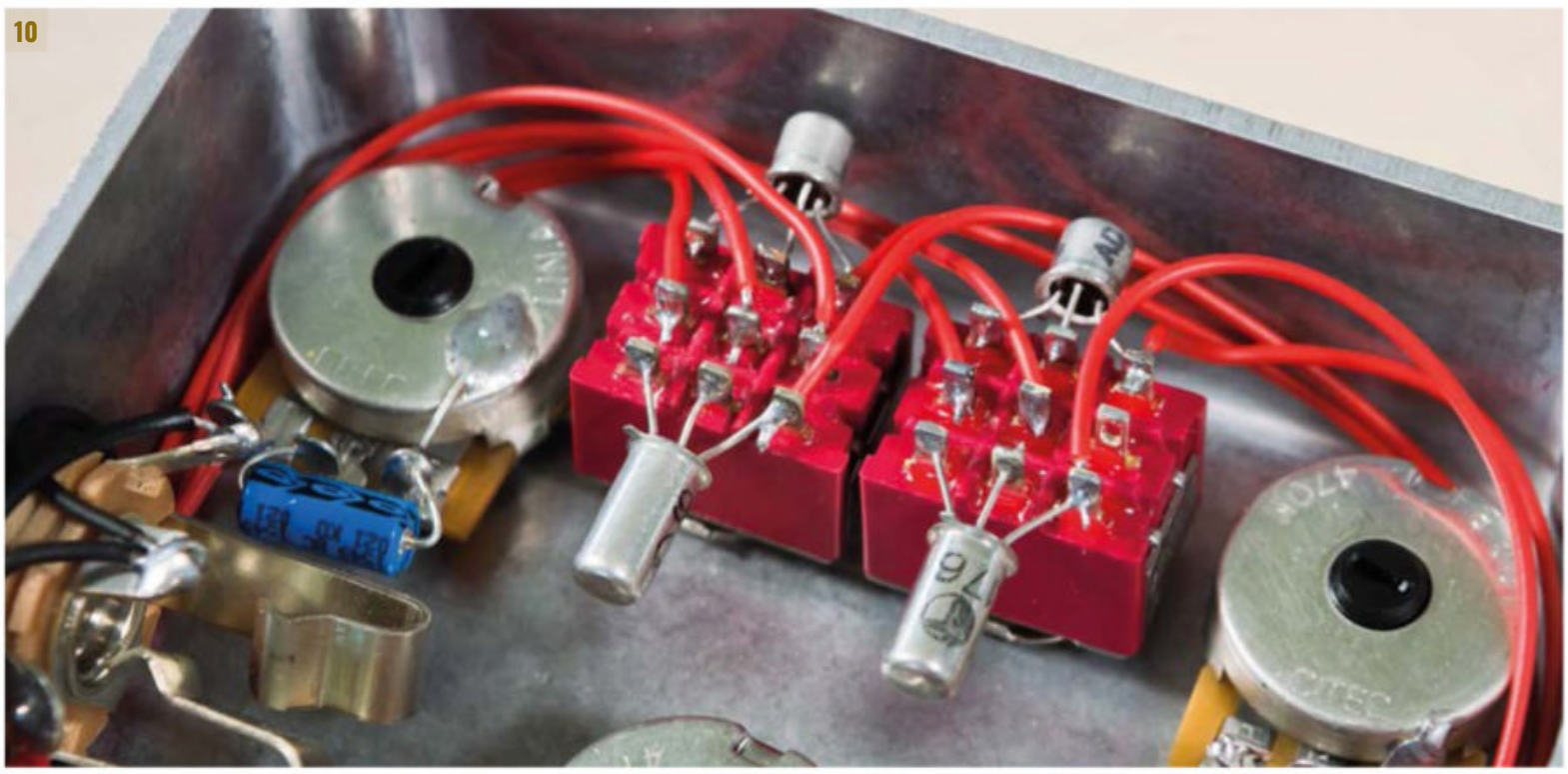
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8 The 47K potentiometer is the Fuller mod impedance control and its effect is subtle but effective

9 Our 'boutique' version is built on a longer turret board to accommodate four transistor bias trim pots

10 3PDT toggle switches allow you to choose between germanium and silicon transistors or use them in combination

11 The finished 'boutique' fuzz

They may even adjust the bias, within safe parameters, to achieve specific overdrive characteristics, enhance clean headroom or optimise dynamic response. Ultimately, it's important to ensure that everything is operating as required.

Transistors are no different in that regard and those magical Fuzz Faces are the ones with transistors that just happened to be non-leaky and biased up perfectly with the stock resistors. The folks at Arbiter didn't select transistors carefully and bias them by ear, which is why they varied so much.

Instead of the 33K and 8K2 resistors, I put in a couple of 20K trim pots. Solder the wiper to one of the outer legs and it becomes a variable resistor that can be preset to the specified value if you have a multimeter.

Visit electrosmash.com/fuzz-face, another fantastic Fuzz Face resource, and you'll find all the recommended voltages across all the important locations in the circuit. But don't be terribly concerned about matching these in your pedal. By far the best way to set up any Fuzz Face is to rely on your ears.

Adjust one trim pot at a time while you're playing to hear how the sound changes. At one extreme, you'll likely hear ferocious fuzz with little or no sustain and a gating effect. I prefer to set mine for a smooth tone with a long and even decay. It's also worth turning your guitar down a notch or two to hear how the bias settings work for those rolled-back and cleaner Hendrix-style tones.

This part is particularly fun and especially satisfying because, if you listen carefully and take your time, you should be able to turn an average fuzzbox into a fantastic one. After all that tweaking, it might be enough for you. But there are some interesting additional mods to consider if not.

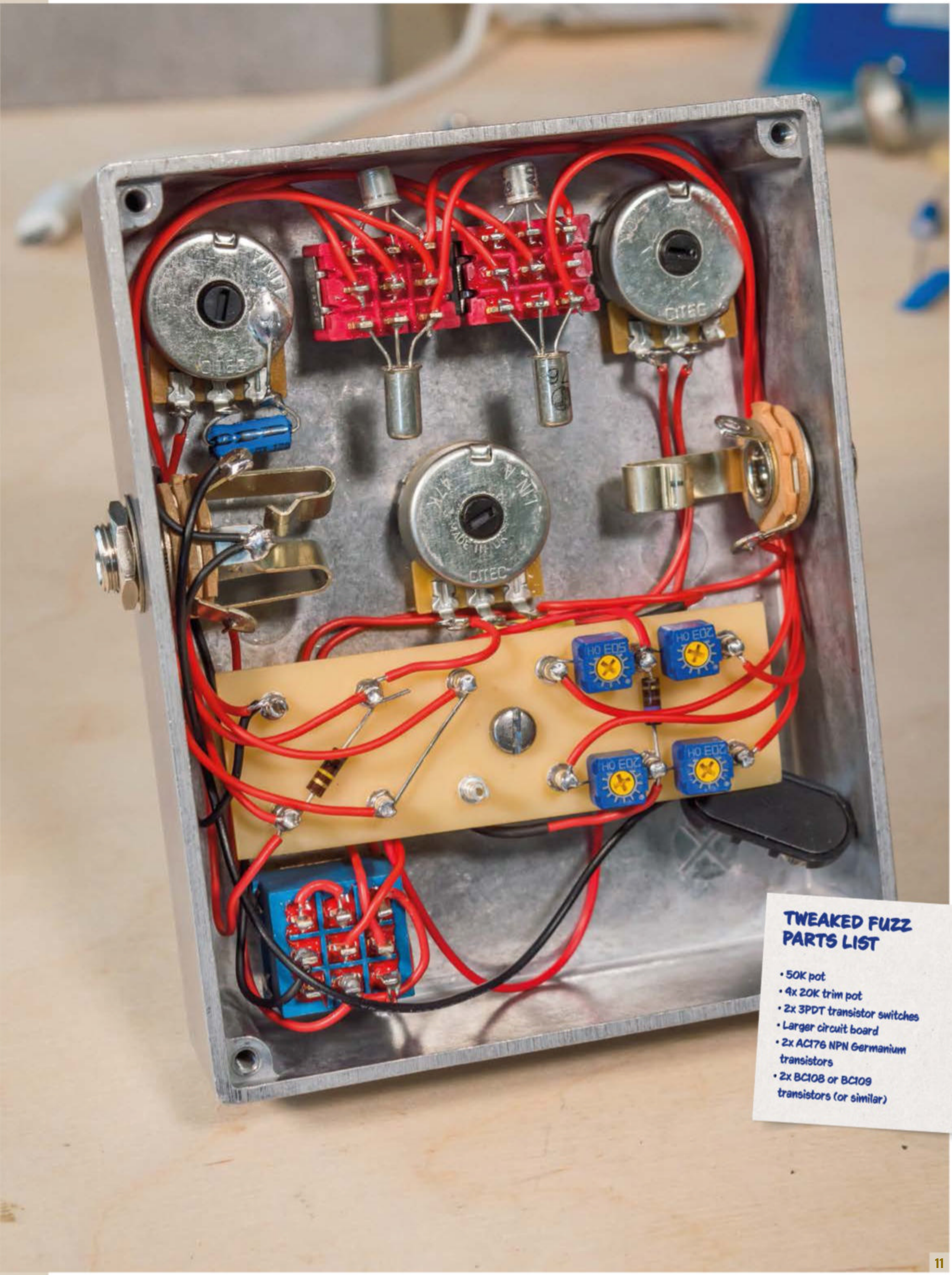
FULLER MOD

Though he's been embroiled in controversy of late, Mike Fuller of Fulltone came up with some effective tweaks for his takes on the Fuzz Face. My favourite is the 50K potentiometer wired as a variable resistor between the input socket and the 2.2uF input capacitor.

According to guitar electronics guru RG Keen, this "raises the apparent source impedance of the pickup". The electronic explanation of this gets a little complicated but the modification adds clarity and gives the guitar's volume control a more useable and progressive response. You lose some sheer fuzz through this mod but there's still more than enough and the smoother decay makes up for any decrease. The bass gets a bit tighter and better defined too. If you turn your guitar volume down to about seven or eight and then gradually back off the bias control, you'll hear it hit a sweet spot in which you can enhance clarity without losing too much girth.

TIGHTER BASS

Though many people love the fat and frazzled charms of the Fuzz Face, some players criticise them for having too much bass and sounding woofy in the low end. This tone can all too easily veer into muddiness and give the circuit an unfortunate muffled quality, especially with humbucker-equipped guitars.



TWEAKED FUZZ PARTS LIST

- 50K pot
- 4x 20K trim pot
- 2x 3PDT transistor switches
- Larger circuit board
- 2x AC176 NPN Germanium transistors
- 2x BC108 or BC109 transistors (or similar)

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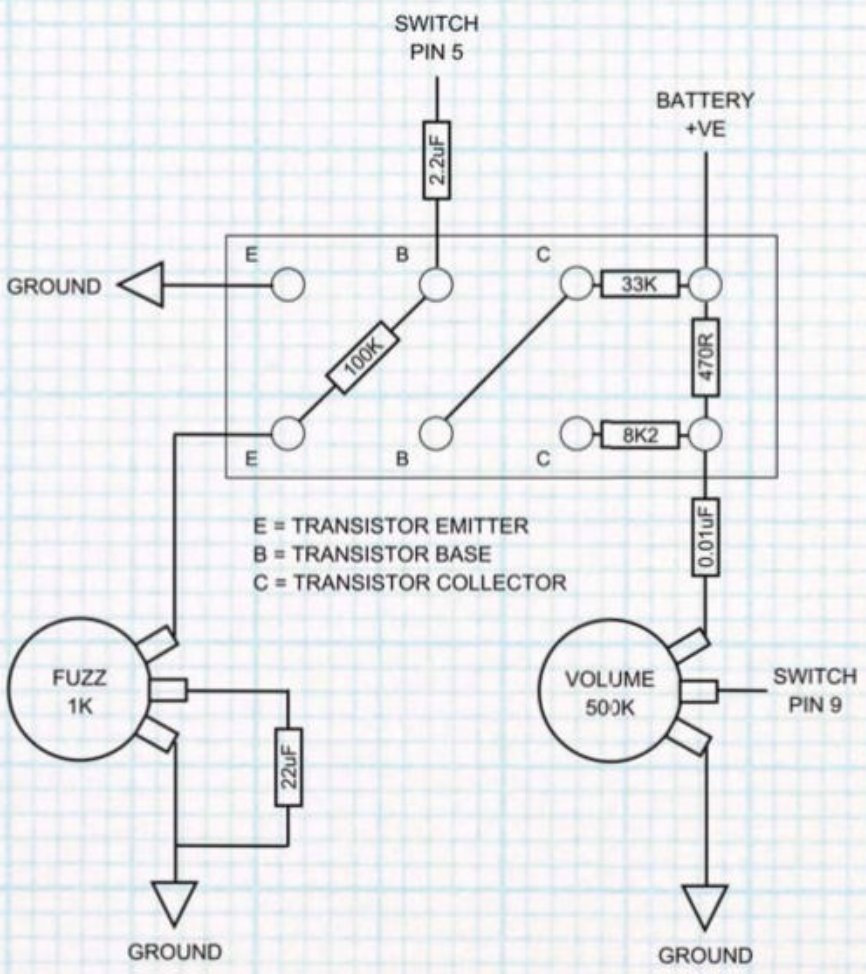
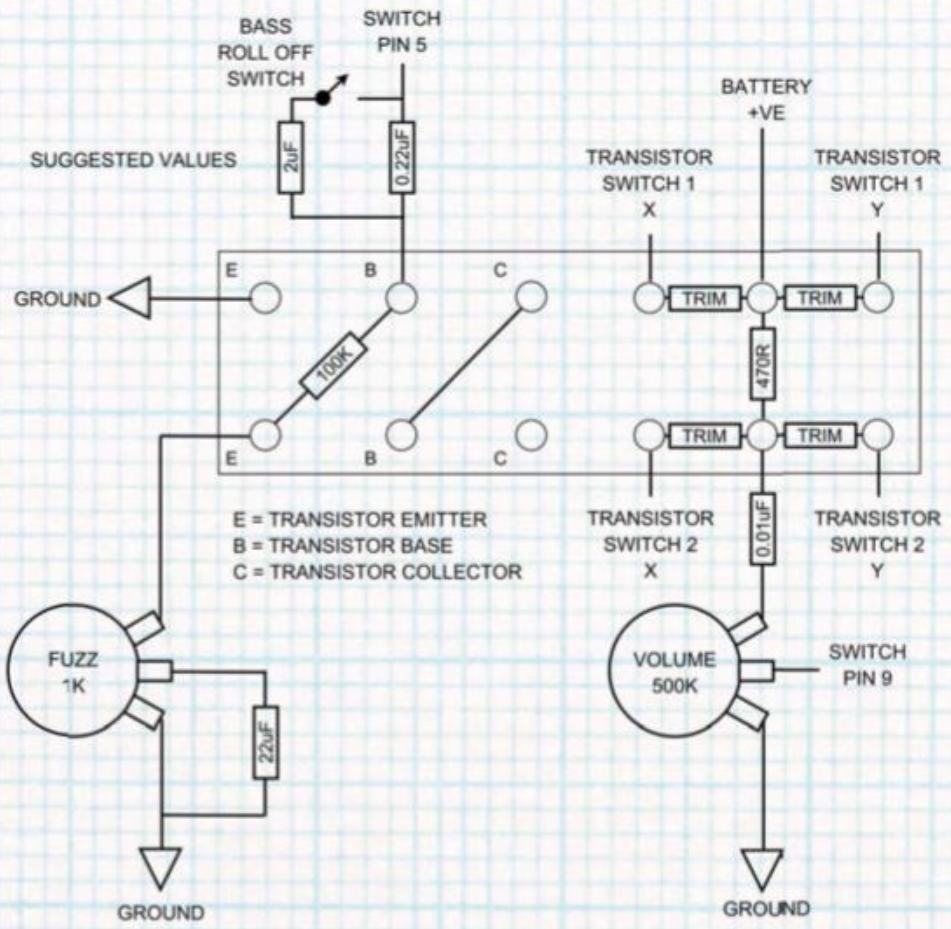
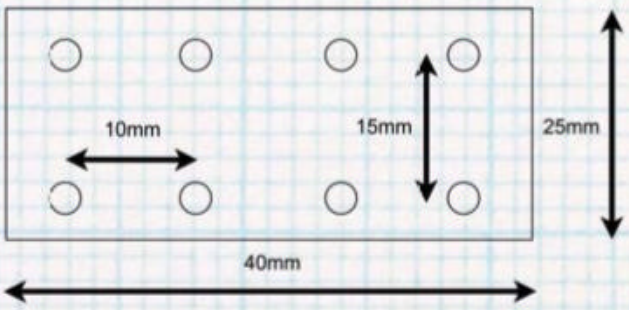
BASIC FUZZ



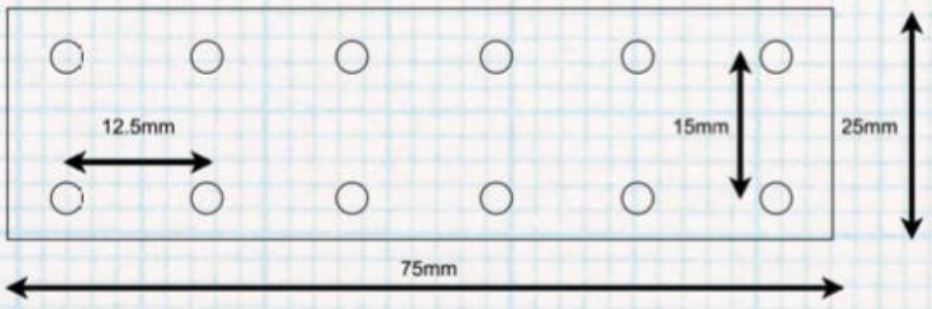
TWEAKED FUZZ



CIRCUIT BOARD 1



CIRCUIT BOARD 2



Replacing the 2.2uF input capacitor with a smaller value capacitor will prevent the lowest frequencies from reaching the first transistor. The smaller it is, the less bass will make it through. Experiment with different values to achieve the bass response that best suits your guitar and amp. I'd suggest 0.47uF or even 0.22uF as reasonable starting points. Using lower value capacitors means you can try film caps rather than electrolytics, which may have tonal benefits.

You can make this bass roll-off a permanent feature or a switchable option. To make it switchable, install the smaller capacitor in place of the 2.2uF and connect a larger capacitor across the smaller capacitor in parallel with a switch to make and break the connection. Combining a 0.22uF with a switchable 2uF capacitor will give you 2.22uF when they're in combination.

GERMANIUM OPTION

Germanium transistors are associated with positive-grounded PNP Fuzz Faces. But you can get NPN germanium transistors too. They will slot right into this circuit with no need to alter the power supply or battery connections. I'm using a pair of AC176 transistors – inexpensive compared to classic PNP germanium fuzz transistors.

Replacing silicon with germanium will require some more trim-pot tweaking. Arbiter also used a 330R resistor rather than a 470R resistor for the germanium circuit but changing to 330R isn't essential.

Using 3PDT toggle switches, you can make your fuzzbox run on both types of transistor. You can also combine silicon in the first stage with germanium in the second or vice versa. Alternatively, you can switch between different types of silicon transistors. It's entirely up to you.

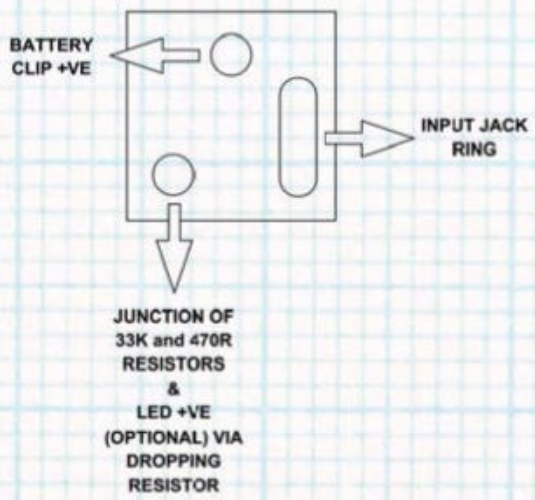
For this, I make a larger circuit board with my preferred turrets for soldering – it has to be larger to accommodate four trim pots. I mount the toggle switches between the fuzz and level controls for protection and wire them to the circuit board.

With all four transistors biased by ear, the silicon sound is brighter, grittier, more aggressive and sustains a little longer. Germanium sounds warmer, less gainy and has sweeter tones when you back off the guitar volume. Both the silicon and germanium combinations work well too, providing different fuzz textures and compression characteristics.

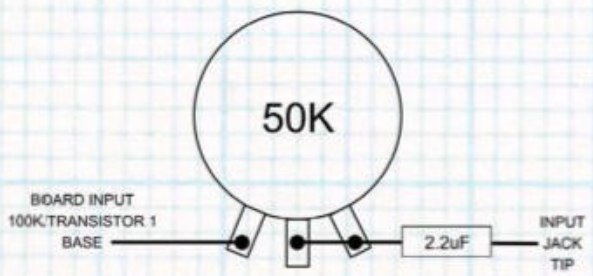
The transistor-switching version of this pedal requires more work but it's worth the additional effort. The AC176 transistors are the star of the show for me so I'm planning to try out some alternative silicon transistors in the future. Think of it like swapping the tubes in your amp.

I'll be the first to admit that this pedal lacks visual appeal but it certainly resembles a boutique fuzzbox on the inside – and it sounds like one too. Feel free to draw your own conclusions about that while I decide on the finish, graphics and extravagantly retro knobs. Happy soldering – and try not to burn your fingers.

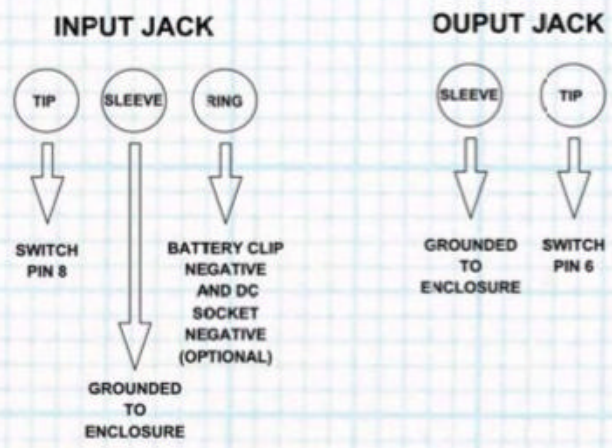
DC SOCKET



FULLER MOD

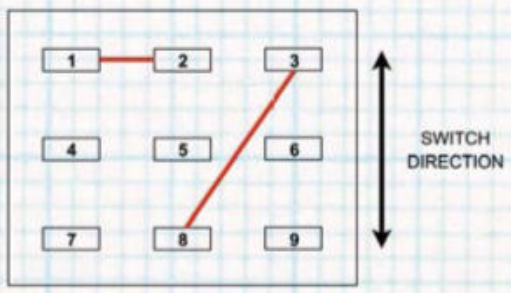


JACK SOCKET CONNECTIONS



SWITCH CONNECTIONS

NOTE ORIENTATION OF SWITCH TAGS



PIN 1 - CONNECT TO PIN 2

PIN 2 - CONNECT TO PIN 1

PIN 3 - CONNECT TO PIN 8

PIN 4 - TO GROUND

PIN 5 - TO TRANSISTOR 1 BASE VIA 2.2uF CAPACITOR

PIN 6 - TO OUTPUT JACK TIP

PIN 7 - LED NEGATIVE (OPTIONAL)

PIN 8 - TO INPUT JACK TIP AND SWITCH PIN 3

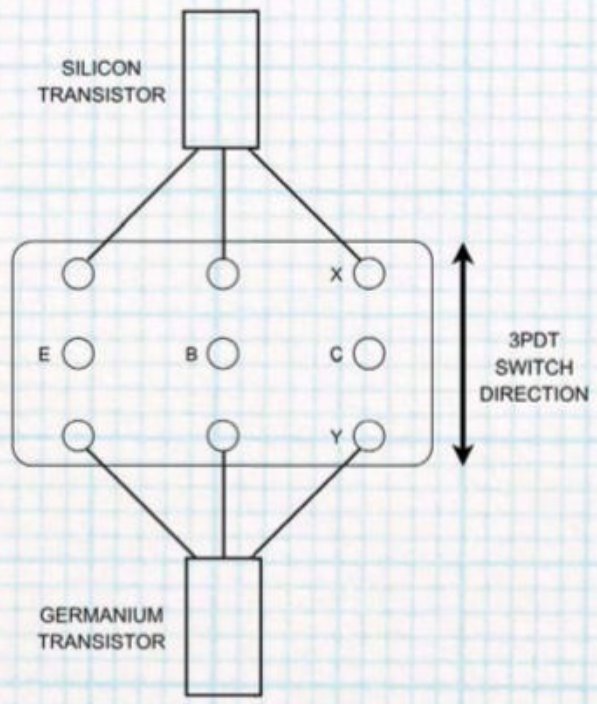
PIN 9 - VOLUME CONTROL CENTRE TAG

TRANSISTOR SWITCHING

E = TRANSISTOR EMITTER
B = TRANSISTOR BASE
C = TRANSISTOR COLLECTOR

CONNECT ALL THREE TO MAIN CIRCUIT BOARD FOR T1

C DOESN'T NEED TO BE CONNECTED TO BOARD FOR T2



AMPLIFIER FAQ

Bulging, leaky capacitors can make amplifiers noisy or unusable. Luckily, help is at hand from Rift head honcho Chris Fantana

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

1

1 The trio of can capacitors removed from the amplifier

2 This Marshall 4104 dates to January 1984

3 The capacitors have failed, with electrolyte leaking from their vent holes

4 The replacement capacitors fit neatly into the amp's existing holes

5 The serial number is stamped into the rear panel

WHAT IS A CAP JOB AND WHAT DO FILTER CAPS DO?

I recently took my Marshall JCM800 to my local amplifier tech because it was making an awful hum. He said that it needs a cap job. What does this mean and what does it involve?
Russell, Aberdeen

Much like the tyres and brakes on your car, there are components inside your amplifier that simply wear out with everyday use. Potentiometers, sockets and switches all have a limited lifespan and will eventually need swapping out. Unlike your car, however, there's not a service schedule for your guitar amplifier that handily explains when things are likely to expire. Unless you know what to look out for, it's usually a case of waiting until it fails.

There are some components inside your amplifier that are highly stressed while doing a very important job. These are called the filter capacitors (AKA the smoothing caps) and sit in the high-voltage rail. Their job is to smooth out or filter any ripple in the rectified high voltage that feeds the valves.

Fig.1 (opposite) shows the HV rail from a 50-watt JCM800, model 4104 (the combo version of the 2204) that recently came in with the same complaint. On the left, you'll see the transformer, the standby switch, rectification diodes, and the HV fuse. On the right, we have six 50uF capacitors – these are the filter caps. In this instance, they're arranged in three groups of two. This is because, in this amplifier, the physical caps are packaged exactly like that. The two-in-a-can format is pretty common and, thankfully, replacements are still being manufactured today.

Each capacitor or 'node' along the rail is given a label, in this case A-E. Each node is where the HV DC is tapped off to feed the various parts of the circuit. I have annotated each node so you can see what is fed from where.

Look at node A and you can see that it feeds the output transformer. The DC is fresh from the rectifiers at the point so it needs quite a lot of smoothing and filtering to make it useable. The two 50uF capacitors at this node are wired in parallel, creating a single 100uF capacitor capable of a large amount of smoothing. This capacitor is also known by the name reservoir capacitor, and its primary function is to store the bulk of the energy of the whole amplifier.

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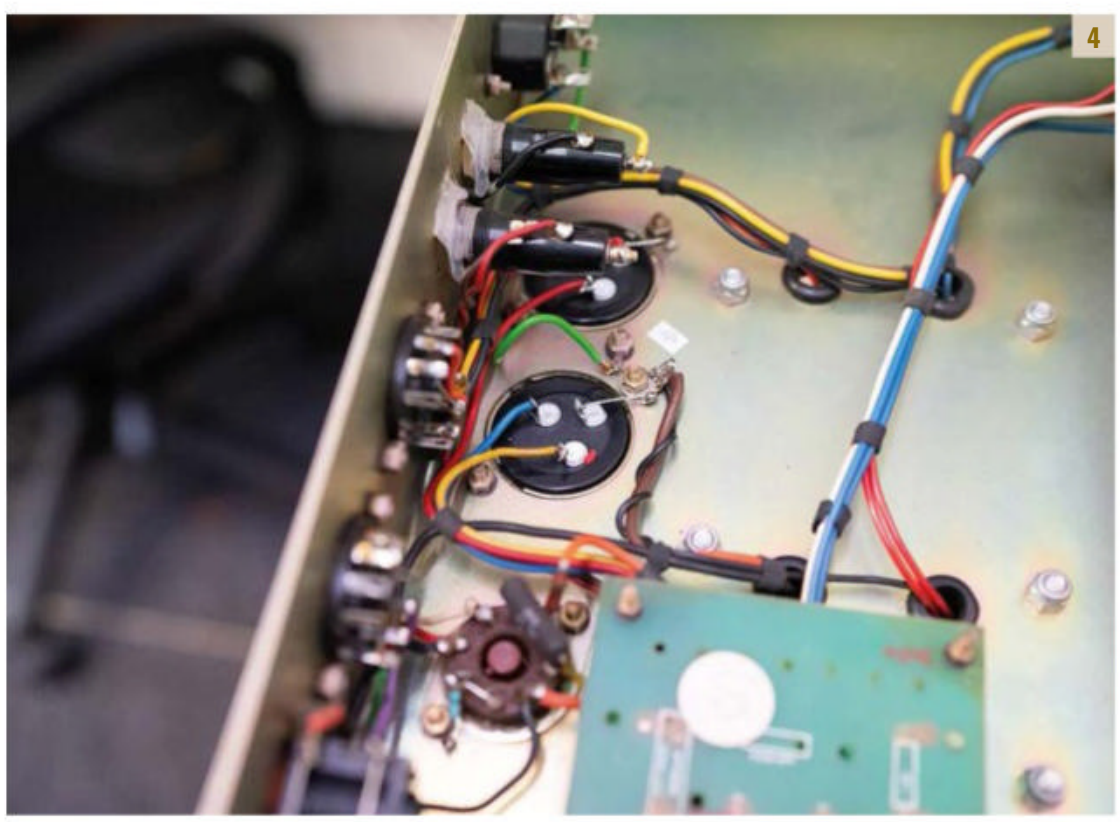
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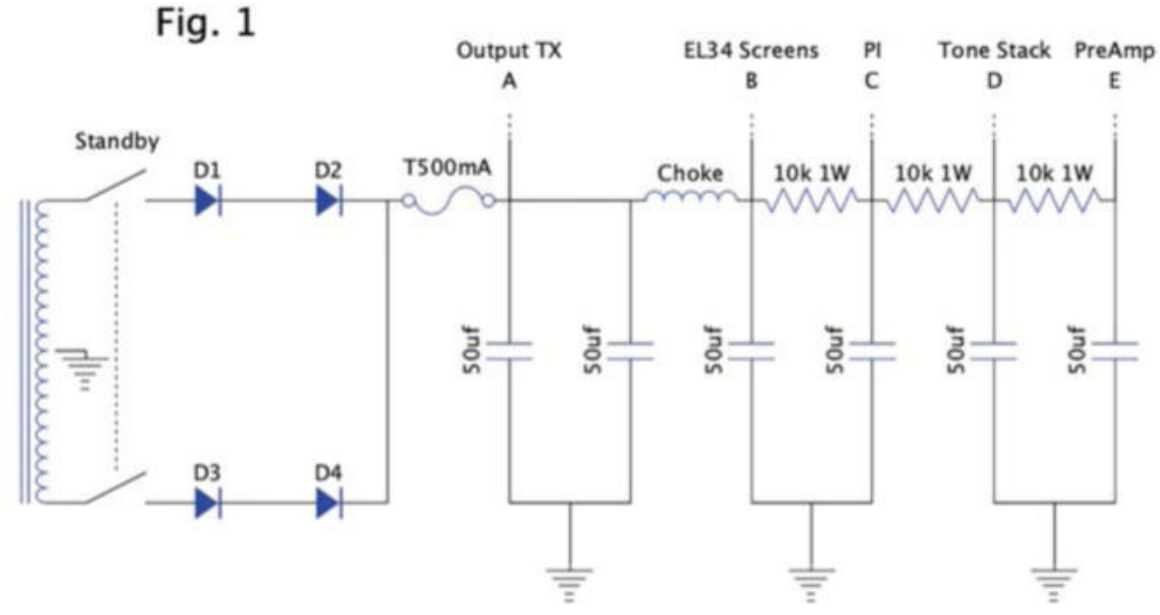
Node B is placed after a choke – we'll discuss the function of these next month – and has a single 50uF capacitor. The screen grids of the output valves require cleaner DC than the output transformer, so additional smoothing is required. Then, as we go down the rail towards the final node, E, we see that each stage is smoothed further still. The preamp section of the amplifier is the most sensitive to noise, so this stage must have the cleanest and most noise-free DC.

As you can imagine, if any of these capacitors don't work correctly and cannot smooth out the ripple, the amplifier will hum. This could be low-level and barely noticeable if the caps are only just starting to fail or it could be so loud that the amplifier becomes unusable. Quite often, a visual inspection of these capacitors might reveal their condition.

In image three, you can see the three capacitor cans removed from the JCM800 combo. Each has erupted from the centre relief, spewing electrolyte onto the outer cover. If this amplifier was regularly inspected by a technician, they would've noticed a bulge forming in that spot, indicating that the capacitor was no longer serviceable and required replacement. A capacitor can also be tested electrically, checking both the capacitance and electrical leakage.

Fig. 1



Replacing these caps is fairly easy but can be quite time-consuming depending on both the quantity and location of each capacitor inside the chassis. Fortunately, this isn't a job that must be done regularly, with most needing replacement every 10 years or so, depending on usage.

Visit riftamps.com for more on Rift's range of British-built boutique amplifiers

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TECH TALK

HOW TO FIT A MASTERY BRIDGE TO A JAGUAR WITH A MUTE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

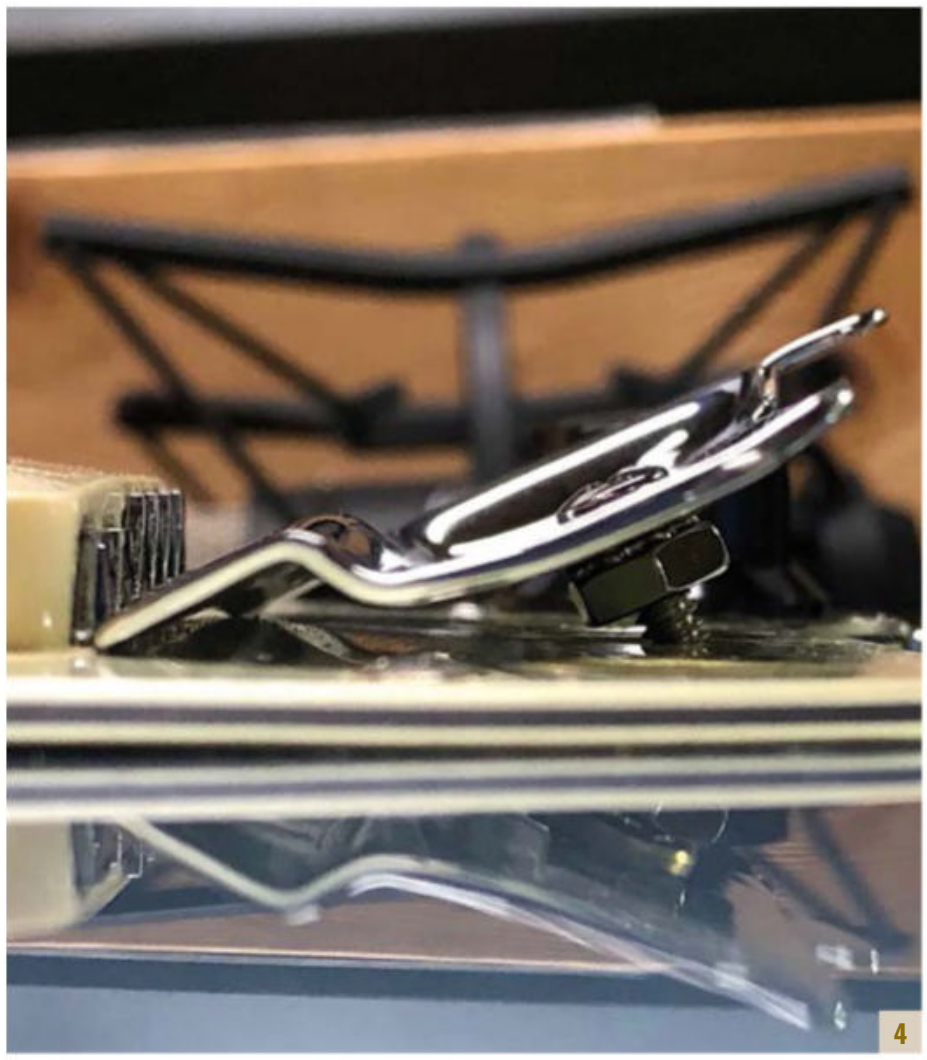
Want to upgrade the bridge on your vintage-style Jag but maintain a functional mute? Let us be your guide

We're starting off strong in 2021 with a job that involves a Fender AVRI Jaguar and a Mastery Bridge. Normally, installing a Mastery is a relatively simple procedure: you open up the tin and pop it into the existing body inserts. But for the owner of this grand Jaguar, it was a little more complicated.

Jaguars and Jazzmasters look similar but they're different beasts. They share vaguely the same body shape and sport the same bridge and vibrato but their dissimilar scale lengths – 25.5 inches on the Jazzmaster, 24 for the Jaguar – and pickups unique to each model are features that add up to quite the gulf in sound and utility.

Another noteworthy deviation with the Jaguar is the addition of the Fender Mute, a device I've praised time and again over the years. A mechanical solution to string muting, it's basically a spring-loaded plunger in the body that presses against a centre post mounted to the mute plate itself, causing the plate to pivot and push a strip of foam into the path of the strings.

This action limits how much the strings can vibrate, leaving the player's picking hand free to strum as energetically as they like without requiring it to remain anchored in the bridge position. When set up correctly, it gives the guitar a sound not unlike that of an electric banjo: all attack and no sustain. It sounds amazing fed into spring reverb and other ambient effects.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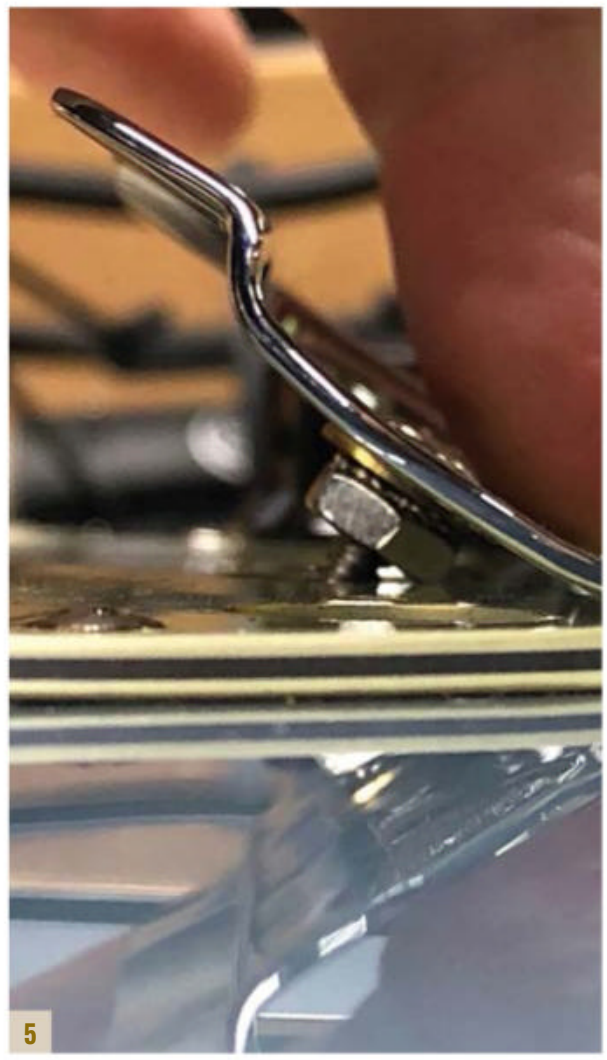
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1 Just look at it – Blue Ice Metallic is underrated

2 Up close and personal with the bridge and mute system

3 The mute plate is secured via two screws beneath the bridge and pivots thanks to a central post that makes contact with a spring-loaded plunger installed in the body

4 The mute plate in its disengaged position...

5 ...and in its engaged position

6 & 7 As you can see, the plate won't accept the wider posts of the Mastery

8 Use a wooden block to keep the plate steady while drilling

6

7

8

Admittedly, though, the majority of players never found use for the quirky contraption, which explains why we see so many of them removed and tucked in cases or left in place like vestigial guitar organs, there for the look but rarely employed.

Most customers request that the mute is removed when installing a Mastery, largely because the holes in the mute plate are too small for the new bridge posts. The owner of this '62 reissue Jag, however, wanted to retain the look and functionality – and I was happy to accommodate.

KNOW THE DRILL

The posts of the Mastery bridge are larger in diameter than those of the stock bridge, letting it lock in with the body inserts. This prevents it from rocking back and forth and has the added benefit of increased resonance and sustain. The downside is that those posts are much too big to pass through the mute plate cut-outs.

Thankfully, widening those holes is a relatively easy procedure. First, I remove the original plate from the body, which is mounted to it only by two screws located beneath the bridge. The owner of the guitar provided a brand-new mute plate for the job so the original can remain in factory condition. I set aside the old one and prep the new one instead.

I planned on using a drill press but, when working with a press in combination with small parts, it can be very helpful to use an oversized wooden block as a base, which makes it easier to hold and control as you drill away. I simply drill three small holes for the mounting screws and go about my business.

When altering existing holes in metal parts, I recommend using a step drill bit, which is a conical drill bit that looks rather like a Lego Christmas tree, as if numerous round metal segments of increasing diameter were laid atop one another. I've used these bits to drill holes in pedal enclosures and to add controls to metal pickguards, as well as a number of other jobs. I believe I was aiming for 3/8 inch at this point in the process but I neglected to take a photography of this part of the procedure because hey, safety first, so use your imagination and picture me slowly drilling step by step.

9

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9 After drilling, I use a large file to finalise the shape of the holes and remove burrs and rough edges

10 Now we have more than enough clearance

11 It looks like a perfect fit...

12 It is a perfect fit!

13 Oh yeah, I swapped the pickguard out as well

14 In these close-ups, you can see how the mechanism works with the Mastery installed. Disengaged...

15 ...and engaged

16 The Jaguar is strung up and ready to roll

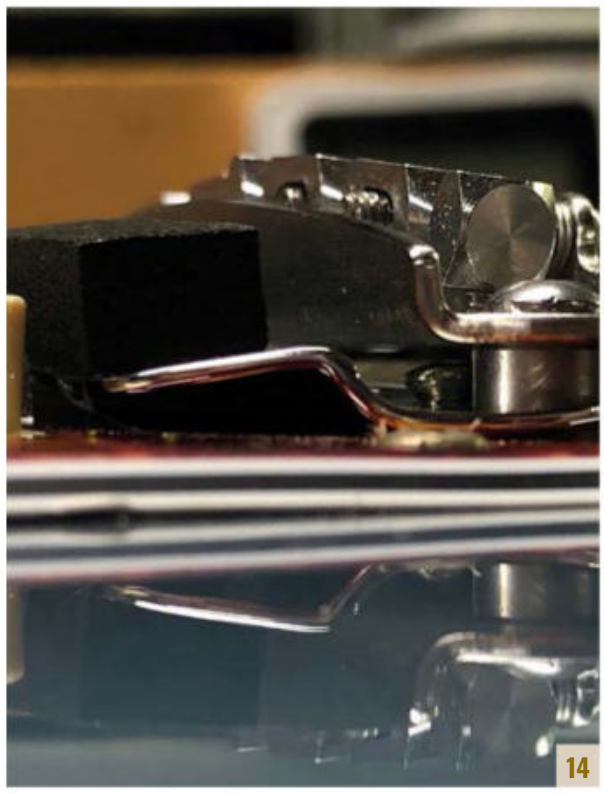
Now that I've sized those holes appropriately, I go over them with a large file to finalise the shape. I want the holes to be somewhat oblong to allow the plate to pivot freely. It's also a good idea to remove burrs and sharp edges, which I do with a much smaller file after the fact.

After some test fitting, we've got a mute plate that readily accepts the Mastery. All there is left to do is to string it up and set the mute to its correct height. The key to this is to get it low enough on the body that there's ample clearance between it and the bridge but high enough that it still moves back and forth, catching in both the engaged and disengaged positions.

When I'm happy with the operation of the mute plate, I install the Mastery bridge, string up the guitar and finish the setup. It's a best-of-both-worlds scenario: you get the seriously cool look of the mute plate *and* the possibility of using it, plus the dependability of one of the best bridges around. G

13

Follow Mike on Instagram @puisheen



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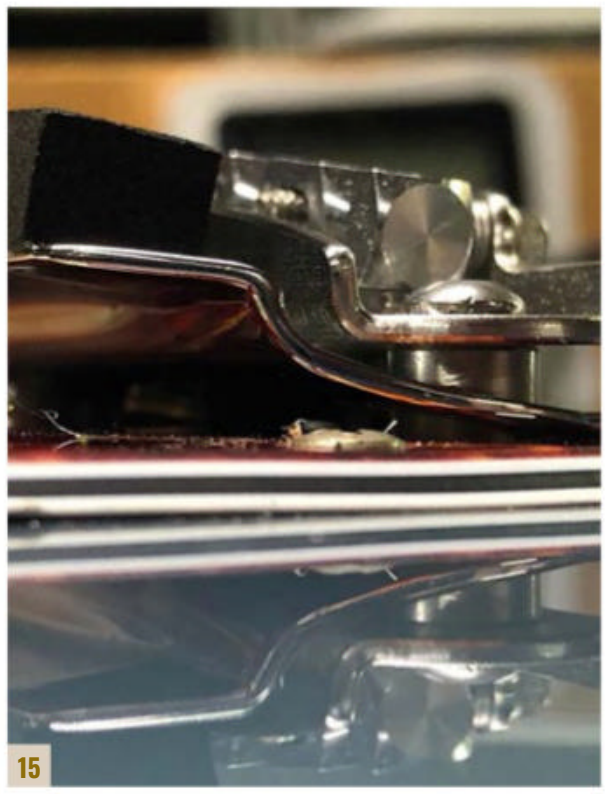

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Buddy wailing on
a Guild Starfire at the
Nice Jazz Festival in 1978

© David Redfern / Redferns / Getty Images

ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PLAY BLUES LIKE **BUDDY GUY**

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

Capture the dramatic, eye-catching style of one of the greatest showmen in the history of electric blues

Bona fide blues legend Buddy Guy is still going strong at the age of 84, showing everyone else how it's done, often with his polka-dot Stratocaster (and matching outfit) in hand.

Born to Louisiana sharecroppers in 1936, young George Guy's childhood picking cotton was transformed when he fashioned himself a diddley bow and began how to make music with string and song.

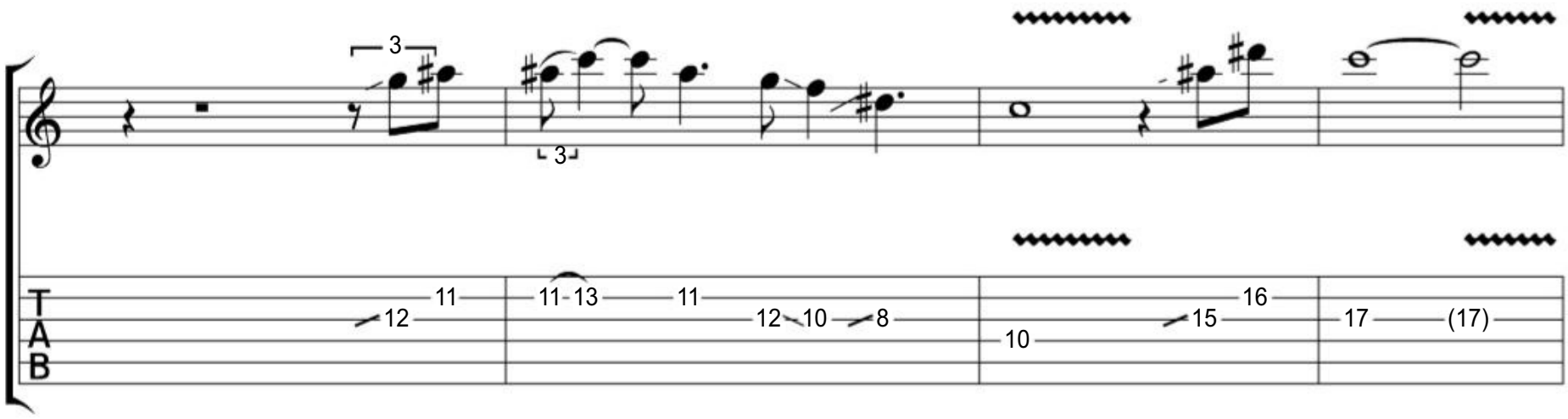
By his late teens, Buddy was playing guitar in bands around Baton Rouge. But it was his move to Chicago in the late 1950s that truly launched his career. Often referred to as an exponent of Chicago blues, his style actually encapsulates influences both traditional and more modern to create a distinct sound that has influenced everyone from Jimi Hendrix to John Mayer and Gary Clark Jr.

Buddy's unique style is all about surprise, pulling the listener in with sudden changes in tempo and dynamics. Here, we're digging into Buddy's fiery blues licks and aggressive pentatonic playing. Enjoy.

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the MGR Music platform. He has more than 10 years of experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. To find guitar tutors in your area, visit mgrmusic.com

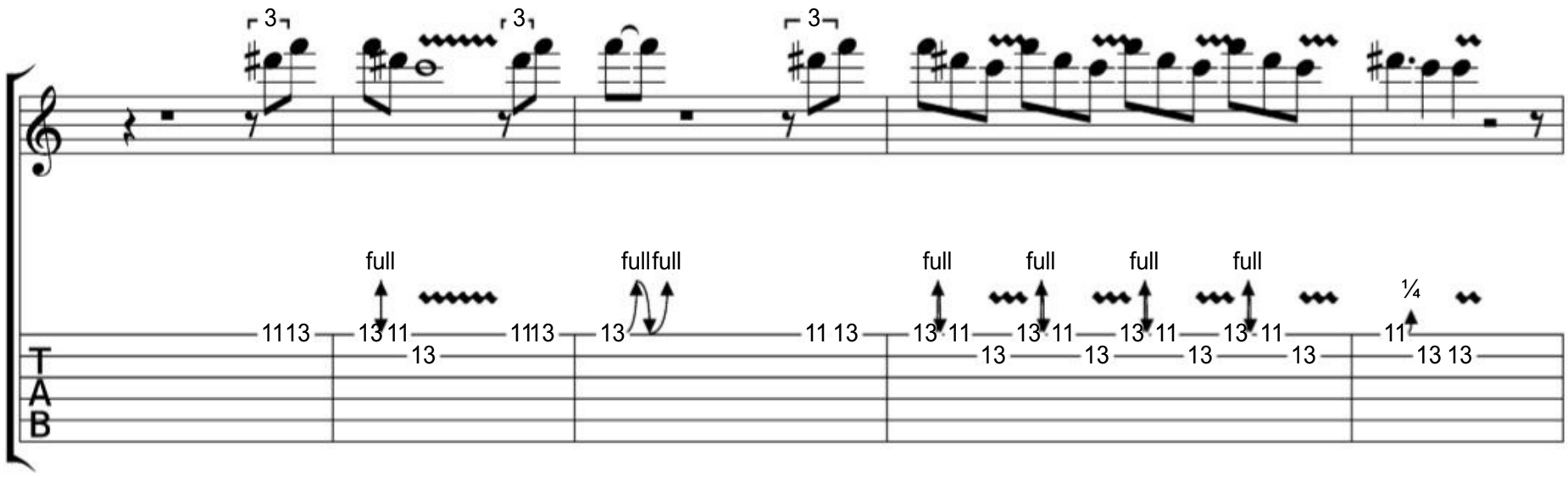
LICK 1

Based between the first and second shapes of the C minor pentatonic scale before jumping to the fourth shape, this turnaround-style phrase might make for a fantastic opening to your song or guitar solo. The lick can be adapted in many ways simply by changing its feel. Play it urgently for a fast blues feel or more laidback for smouldering slow blues jams. If you play it slow, hang on the slides and apply lots of vibrato for maxmimum feel.



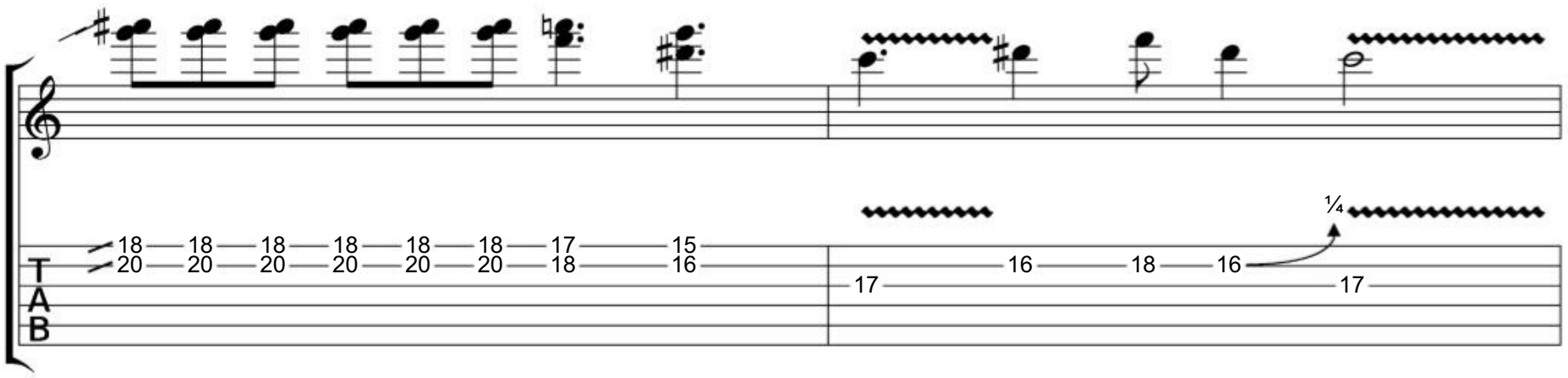
LICK 2

Buddy Guy often uses repeated phrases and motifs as part of his solos, especially at their peak moments. This second-shape pentatonic bending phrase is a perfect example of this. The first few measures set things up by implying the bending phrase before a full bar of repeated speedy bends kicks in.



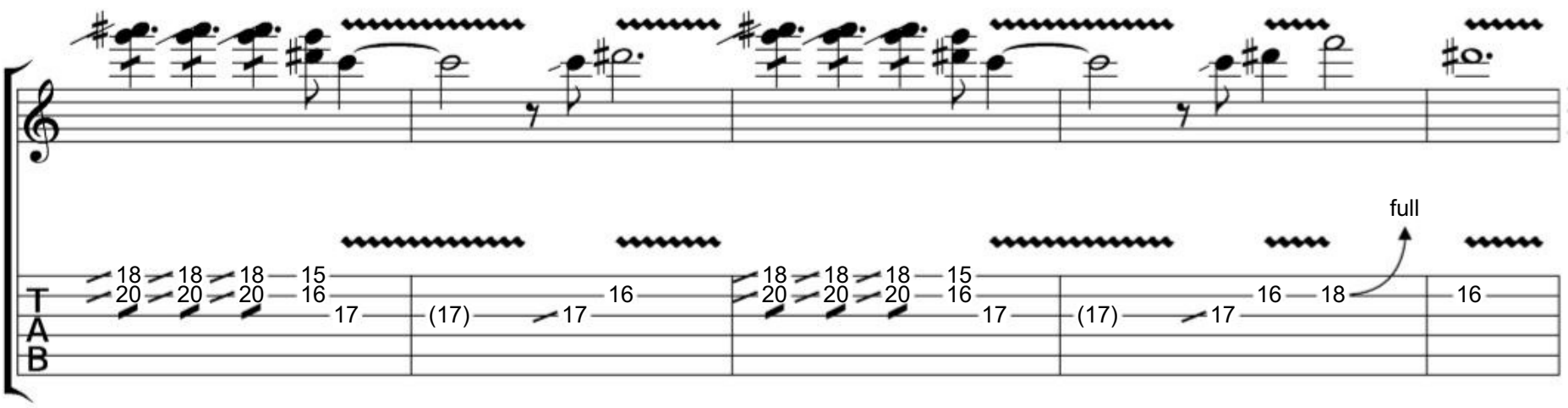
LICK 3

Dyad chords make up a large part of Buddy's playing style, especially when he's trying to make the guitar scream in an aggressive way. These chords come from the fifth and fourth pentatonic shapes, respectively. Dig in as you play them. Buddy picks these kinds of chords hard to make them bite. Once you've run down the dyads, end on a simple lick as shown here.



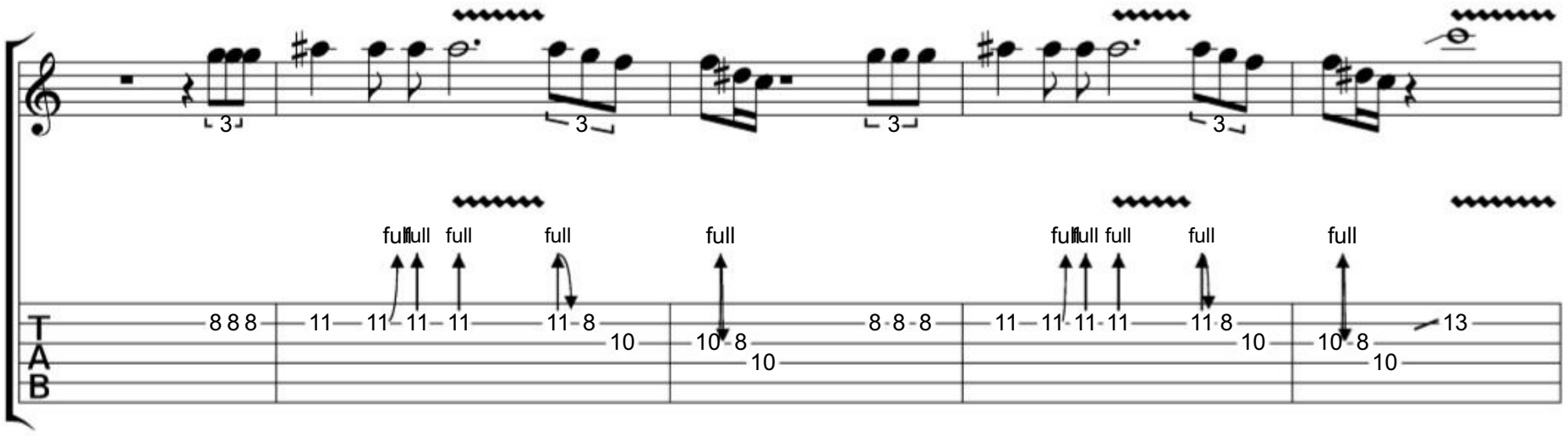
LICK 4

This tremolo-picked phrase represents another way that Buddy uses dyads, often dropping into this sort of progression when he wants his solo to take off. This lick is based on the same principle as the previous example but here you're digging into those dyads more with tremolo picking. Don't worry about accuracy here. It's more about creating a mood generating intensity within the solo.



LICK 5

Our final example is another repeated idea based in the first pentatonic shape and showcases Buddy's use of quick note flurries. He often inserts short bursts of speed into his playing, especially on descending licks such as this one. Notice the space between the flurries too, which creates breathing room that helps makes the lick seem that bit more focused within the mix.



TRY IT YOURSELF

These five Buddy Guy-style licks are all in the key of C minor and should be played in 12/8 time. You can use these principles in 4/4 too, as the feel between the two time signatures is fairly similar. Head to *Guitar.com* to hear the audio examples.

Buddy digging in during the American Folk Blues Festival tour in London in 1965

© David Redfern / Redferns / Getty Images

BLUE STEEL

THERE'S FIRE IN THIS ICE

CRYOGENICALLY FROZEN

BRILLIANT TONE

LONG LASTING

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McCartney on stage during The Beatles' final tour at the Olympia Stadium in Detroit in August 1966

© Douglas Elbinger / Getty Images

CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE PAUL McCARTNEY PART II

WORDS ROD FOGG

In the second part of our Paul McCartney workshop, we explore the worlds of moving basslines and slash, seventh and diminished chords as the songwriting genius broadens his horizons

All born in the 1940s, The Beatles grew up listening to the popular music of the day: jazz. That counted double for Paul McCartney because his father Jim was the leader of a jazz band. It's no surprise, then, that jazz-associated sounds formed a rather significant part of McCartney's musical DNA and infiltrated his songwriting more and more as he and The Beatles developed.

As the group's bass player, McCartney was also aware of the possibilities of basslines that move by step while the underlying harmony remains static. He was wise to slash chords too, for which the bass note is a note other than the root note of the chord. Get to grips with the techniques below and we'll see you next month for more Beatles-inspired harmony.

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), *The Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

FIGURE 1

Here, we're inspired by a lively acoustic intro. Notice the high position of the first two chords and the open D pedal note beneath them. Pick out the bass note before you strum the rest of the chord, then strum back and forth between the G and C chords, keeping your pinky on the high G on the top string. Lesser songwriters may be happy to continue in the same vein but, to truly catch that McCartney vibe, make up a verse using A minor, E minor and D.

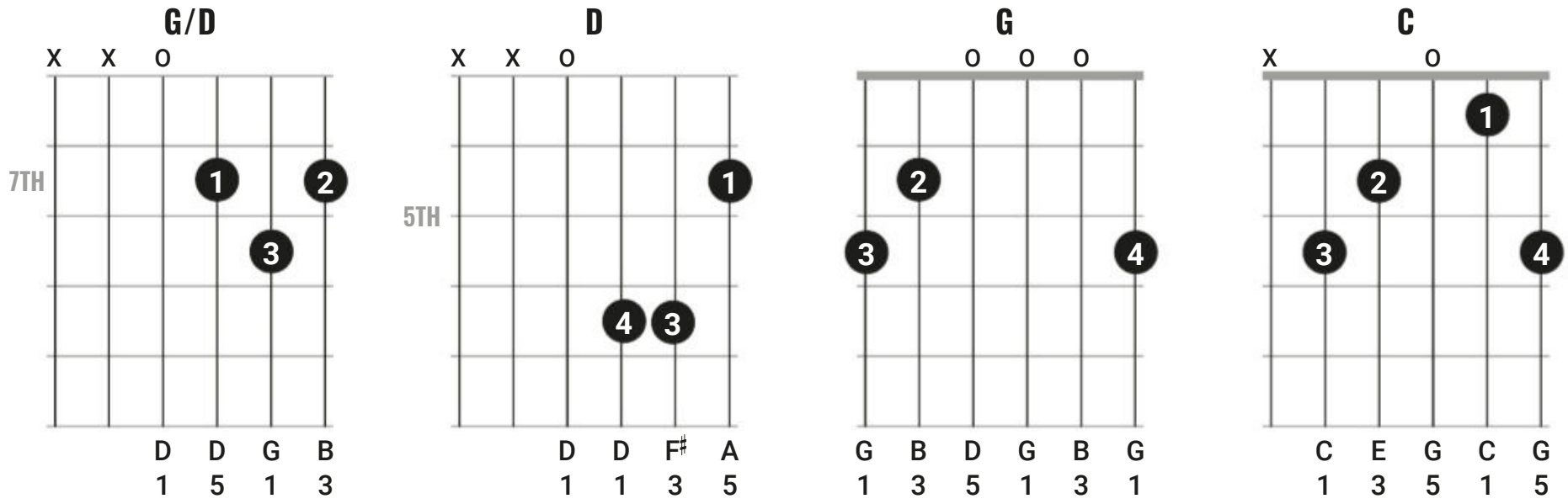


FIGURE 2

This colourful and unpredictable sequence of chords includes two positions of B-flat minor seven and a D diminished seventh chord. Fingerstyle would work well here, picking the bass note with your thumb and using your fingers to create an arpeggio. The sequence ends back on C after you play the last B♭m7. Though it never really sounds like jazz, there's no denying the jazz influence. Depending on how you play the last few chords, you could make a six, seven or eight-bar phrase. Our inspiration was six bars long. See how it works out for you.

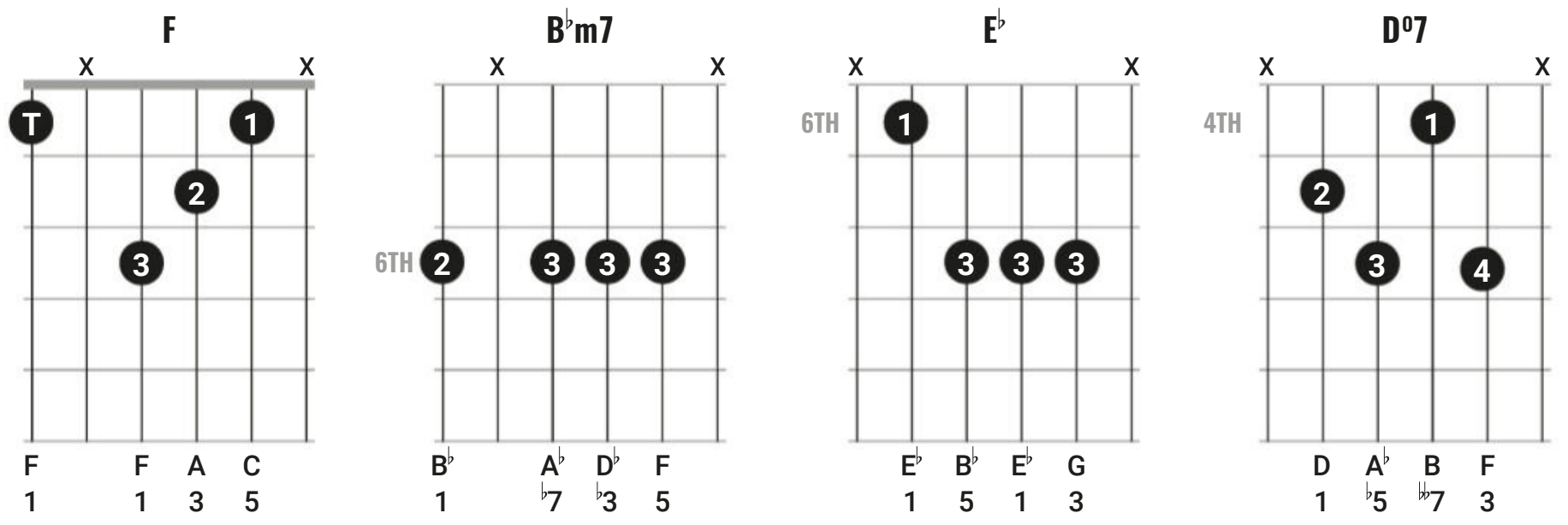


FIGURE 2 CONTINUED

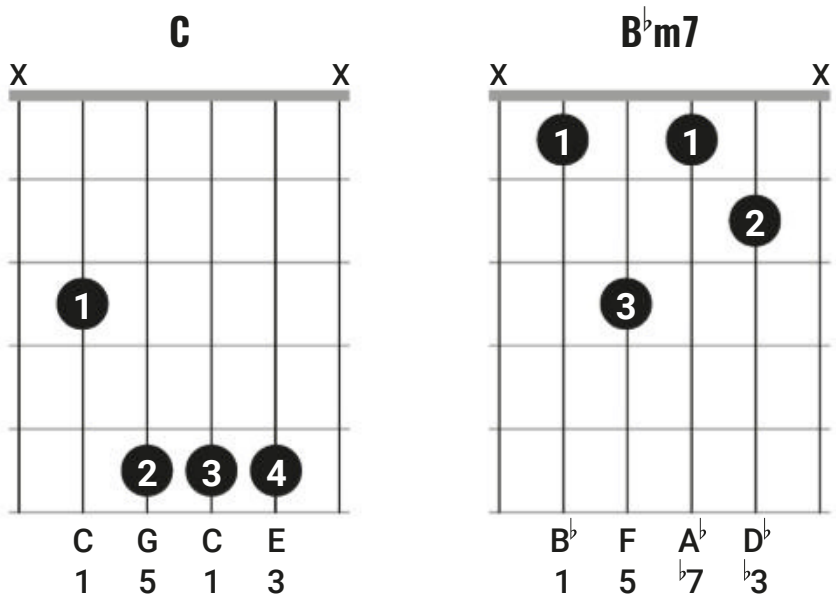


FIGURE 3

Here, we have four bars of strummed acoustic guitar, built from the first three chords by playing either the D minor or the A major chord for two bars. Then we move on to the B chord and build to a characteristic Beatles climax on E7. It's also distinctive because it has minor and major versions of chord II in A major (that's B minor and B major). We were inspired by a middle eight and, as the music heads back to the verse, the next chord would be A. Try experimenting with A, B and D for the next section.

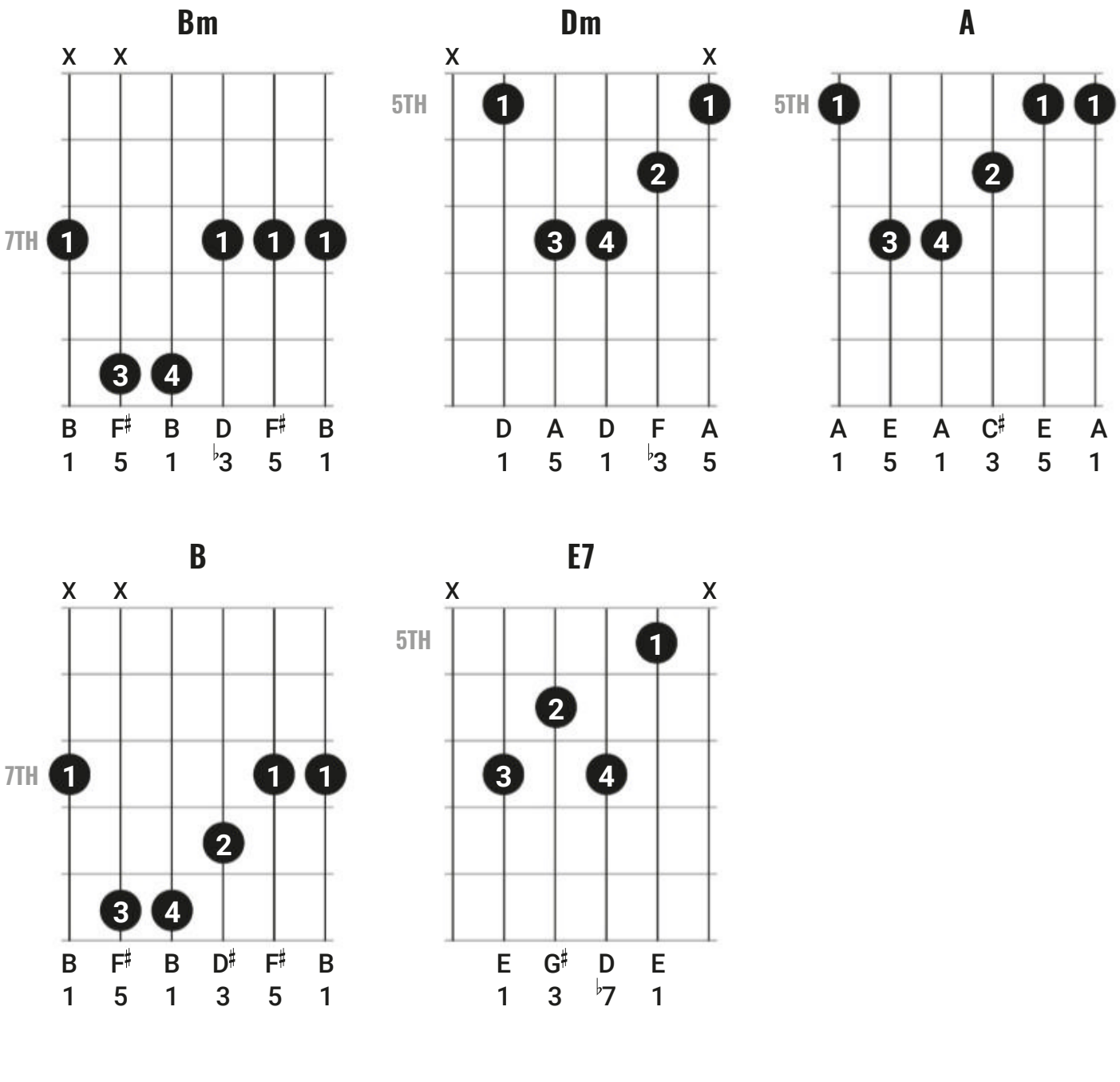
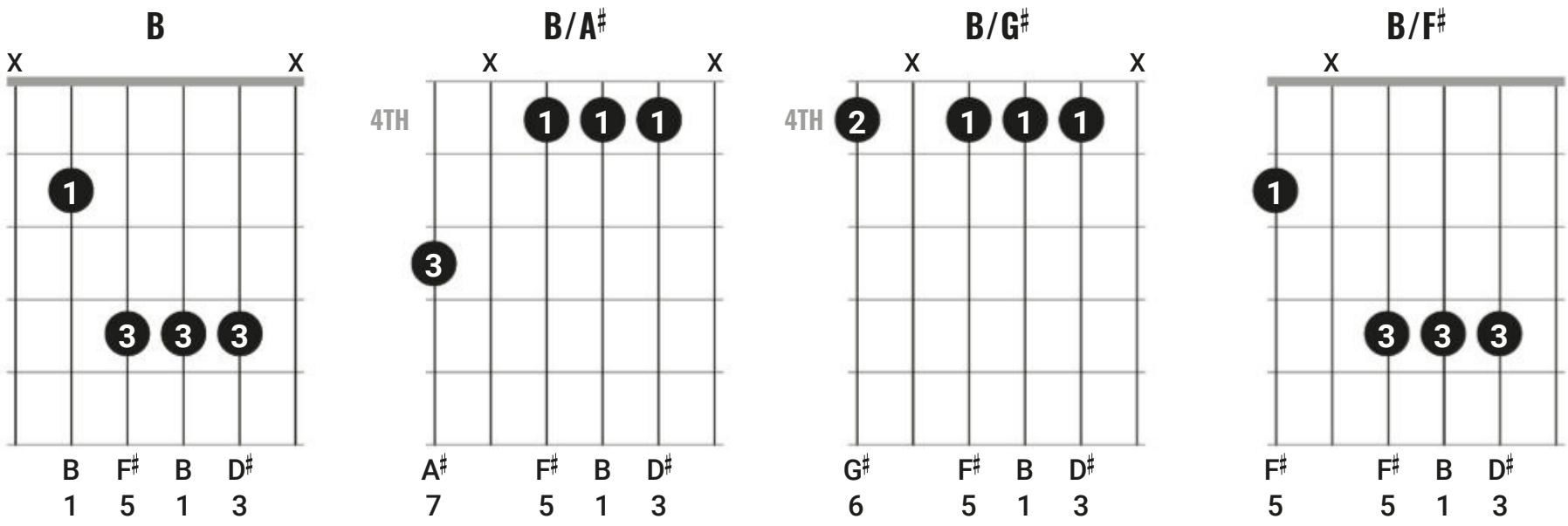
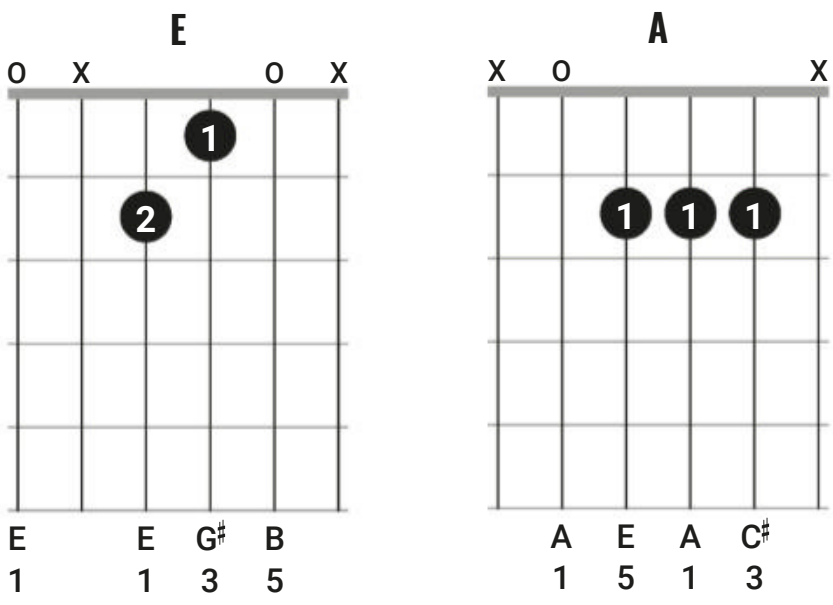


FIGURE 4

Beginning on a B major chord, we have a bassline that makes its way down the B major scale until we arrive on E and A major chords. End with a couple more bars back on B. McCartney was often coming up with ideas like this on the bass but it works well as a guitar part too. Try it with a pick or fingerstyle and start each bar by picking the bass note separately. With a pick, it might be better to finger the full E major chord instead of the four-note version given here. If you struggle making the barre with finger three, try fingers two, three and four instead.





TALKBOX

MOLLY MILLER

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

A session musician and educator who's worked alongside Jason Mraz, Miller is one of the most accomplished players in the industry. Here, she discusses her guitar soulmate and her penchant for karaoke

The moment it all started...

"I started playing guitar when I was seven years old. My parents decided that my four siblings and I would be a band. From that moment on, it was just what I did – it became a big part of my identity. I've had a few of those 'Aha!' moments, like when I was 13 and my guitar teacher showed me *Purple Haze*. I had no idea guitar was cool until that moment, which is so strange to me now. That was the beginning of a shift for me. From then on, playing guitar became a choice. I was a notoriously bad guitar student before that – I never wanted to practise. But after I learnt about Jimi Hendrix, I started to see the light, if you will."

I couldn't live without my...

"My 335. It's my baby. It's from 1978, which isn't a magical year but it's a magical guitar. I hate how attached I am to it. It's almost scarier to have found *the one* because, if anything happens to it, I am destroyed."

The one that got away...

"I feel fortunate that I haven't sold anything I've loved. I need to sell some guitars though. Then I'd be better equipped to answer this question in a more romantic manner."

My signature model...

"I do feel like I have found my soulmate of guitars – sorry that sounds so cheesy. What would be nice is to have another one or two, so I wasn't so attached to my 335! I think a combination of a 335 and a Tele would be ideal. I'd love the sturdiness, punch and versatility of a Tele to join forces with the depth and feel of an ES-335. I find that a lot of semi-hollow bodies are finicky and too midrange-y. My signature guitar would be a solidbody for ease of travel, with a thinner neck – I hate chunky necks – and, most importantly, it would have thousands of hours of play on it already. I find most new instruments to be stiff. Often, guitars need to be played in order to have proper character and flow to them."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"Lately, I play E major up and down the guitar. I love playing chords, phrases, lines and melodies in one key when I first pick up my guitar. I want to connect with my instrument before doing anything else."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"We are never practising. We are always playing. Thank you, Bruce Forman!"

My guilty pleasure...

"Sublime and Third Eye Blind. My go-to karaoke songs!"

If I could be in any band...

"This is a challenging question and no matter what I say, I'll think of more after I submit my answer. Leon Russell, Hendrix, Prince, Ramsey Lewis, Dylan (electric), The Beatles (and iterations of this), Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Otis Redding, James Brown, Randy Newman, Allen Toussaint, Paul Simon, The Roots, Dave Matthews Band (I love to jam when I perform), Fiona Apple, John Mayer, Buck Owens, Willie Nelson… And I can just keep going forever."

I wish I was there...

"Bob Dylan at the Royal Albert Hall in 1966 or Hendrix at Monterey in 1967."

The first thing on my rider...

"Ceremonial matcha with a splash of oat milk, a fresh baguette, extra sharp cheddar cheese and I'm happy."

If I could just play one thing...

"I want to be a shredding slide guitar player one day." G

The new Molly Miller Trio album *St George* is due this year. Follow Molly on Instagram @moodymill

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